



# The Thrill of Hictory

The V Foundation has cause to celebrate. With the generous support of ESPN fans, sponsors and our donors, we raised more than \$2.2 MILLION for cancer research during V Week 2014. Thank you for joining us in our mission to defeat cancer for good.

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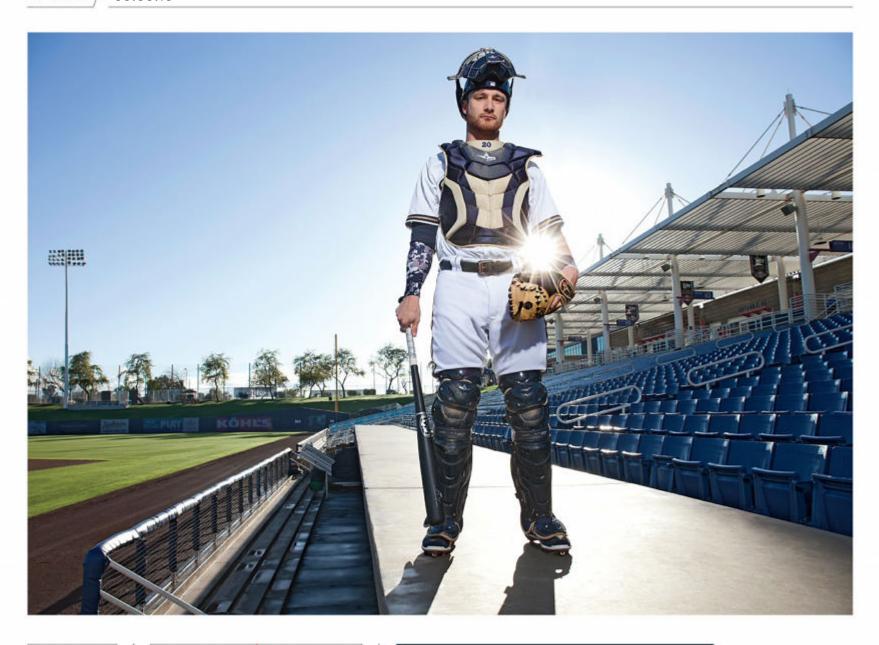
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## THE TICKET



## by MINA KIMES



## [HAPPILY EVER AFTER?] Everyone knows the fairy tale by heart: Team goes on Cinderella run, school rakes in new applications and donations. But the true story isn't that simple.

n March 26, 2006, George Mason advanced to the men's Final Four, becoming the second double-digit seed in NCAA history to make it that far. After the Patriots lost to Florida, their Cinderella story reached its conclusion—but a new fairy tale was just beginning. As the players packed their bags, the media latched onto the next chapter of their inspiring story: the school's ability to profit from it. The Patriots' success had "resulted in a whopping windfall" from merchandise and donations, reported Ad Age. Others touted a 21 percent surge in applications. The university highlighted its payoff in a news release, "The Business of Being Cinderella."

Five years later, something strange happened. George Mason returned to the Dance, advancing to the third round as an 8-seed—and applications barely budged. In 2012, the Patriots didn't make it to the NCAA tournament at all. The next year, applications rose a whopping 42 percent.

So what happened? It's hard to say, because college applications, like donations and ticket sales, are influenced by complex forces ranging from costs to marketing. But complexity often falls by the wayside in stories about the transformative power of sports. Davidson, VCU, Butler, Dayton—all of their narrative arcs were recast as rainbows ending with a pot of gold. The trend dates back to 1984, when Doug Flutie's Hail Mary led Boston College to a last-second upset of Miami. Over the next two years, BC reported a 30 percent increase in applications.

Since then, the "Flutie factor" has been cited widely. It's a nice theory, says Michael Malec, a professor of sports sociology at BC since the 1960s, but it has a major flaw: It fails to account for history. "Applications had been increasing rather steadily since Doug Flutie was in kindergarten," he says. Indeed, interest in the school started growing in the 1970s, when the college opened its doors to women and built more dorms.

A playoff run can jack up a small school's name recognition, but economists who have analyzed the connection between athletic success and applications have found mixed results. One recent study, conducted

by BYU's Jaren Pope and his brother Devin, a University of Chicago professor, found that a trip to the Sweet 16 prompts, on average, a 3.8 percent increase. "It's a temporary bump for two or three years," Jaren Pope says. That might explain what happened at Butler, which saw a 41 percent increase in applications after the college made it to the NCAA championship game in 2010 but only a 2 percent jump after it returned to the final in 2011 as an even bigger underdog.

Other schools see barely any uptick. When Davidson made a run to the Elite Eight in 2008, as a 10-seed led by Steph Curry, several stories trumpeted a surge in applications to the tiny college. The actual bump? Eighty-two more students applied the next year.

Cinderella doesn't leave the ball completely empty-handed. Teams that make it deep into the tourney earn money for their conferences, which then divvy up the cash among members. Schools also occasionally see a rise in donations. Butler, for example, says gifts jumped 18 percent after its 2010 run. (After its second trip, donations rose only 3 percent.)

But donations, like applications, spring from many sources; you have to dig beneath the surface to find their roots. At Wichita State, bequests skyrocketed in 2013 and '14, right after the school reached its first Final Four since 1965. It's tempting to presume cause and effect—and some did—but the biggest gift actually came from the estate of a donor who died in 2012, months before the Shockers upset Gonzaga. Patsy Selby, a vice president at the WSU Foundation, says the benefactor was a patron of the school's engineering program. "That had nothing to do with athletics," she says.

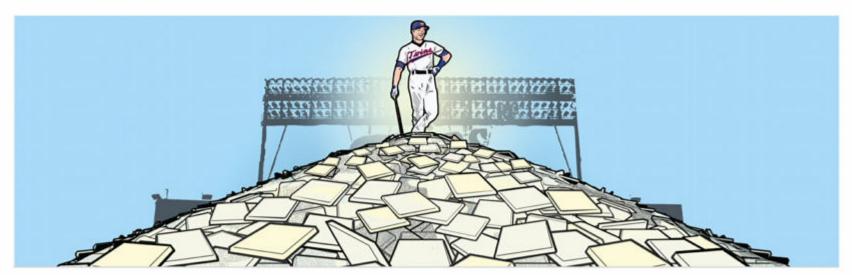
Still, the narrative persists. It might be because we believe that fairy tales deserve happy endings, or because we've internalized the idea that success is meaningless without financial reward (ironic, of course, given that the players aren't paid at all). But BC's Malec, a college basketball fan, offers a simpler explanation: "I think sports fans tend to think that everyone else in the world cares as much about sports as we do."



## THE NUMBERS



## by PETER KEATING



## [FANTASY COME TRUE] The best value in your fantasy draft might just be Brian Dozier. Yes, the .242-hitting Brian Dozier. Here's why.

ith baseball season about to start, I have a fun stat for you that is so simple you can calculate it in your head and it'll tip you off to hidden fantasy values. The metric is runs per hit (RPH), and it's just a player's runs scored divided by his hits.

I know that many sabermetricians barely glance at stats like runs and RBIs, which depend heavily on a player's offensive context, including where he hits in the lineup. But take a deeper look at runs per hit: To excel in this category, a player needs to put himself in scoring position without hitting many singles, so he must have some combination of power, walks and speed. That makes RPH a handy snapshot of his offensive skills beyond batting average. In a world where many fans still gauge hitters by BA, a high RPH often signals underappreciated talent.

In any given year, MLB teams usually score about 0.5 runs per hit. For individual players in single seasons, a ratio of 0.7 is notable, and above 0.9 is historic. For example, Barry Bonds scored 129 runs on 135 hits in 2004, the year he had 45 homers and 232 walks, for an RPH of .956. Bonds' NL-leading batting average of .362 was mighty impressive, but it represented just a fraction of his real value that year.

Bonds' .956 mark is not quite the highest single-season RPH of all time. One man since 1900 charted more runs than hits in a year: Max Bishop, who scored 117 runs on just 111 hits for the 1930 Philadelphia Athletics, yielding a 1.054 RPH. Bishop was a 5-foot-8 second baseman with a career batting average of .271, little power and no speed. But Bishop's nickname was Camera Eye. He drew 82 to 128 walks a season—hugely valuable, considering he often hit leadoff ahead of three HOF hitters (Mickey Cochrane, Al Simmons and Jimmie Foxx). If fantasy baseball existed 85 years ago, you probably could have snagged him and his 100 runs a year on the cheap while your rivals were bidding up Tony Lazzeri.

Bishop is No. 1 in career RPH too (.794), ahead of Bonds, Babe Ruth and Rickey Henderson. Amazingly, Henderson had an RPH of .500 or greater in all but one of the 25 years he played, and he had eight seasons

in which he qualified for the batting title and his RPH was over .800. Henderson truly exemplifies what RPH attempts to capture: Whether he hit .236 or .325, Henderson generated bucketloads of runs because of his eye, his speed and his power.

Which brings us to the MLB leader in RPH for 2014: Brian Dozier of the Twins. Because he hit just .242 last year, you might not have noticed that Dozier scored 112 runs, second only to Mike Trout in MLB. Like Bishop, Dozier is overlooked because he's a shortish second baseman with a low batting average. But like Henderson, Dozier has a broad range of skills that keeps him scoring: 57 extra-base hits, 89 walks and 21 stolen bases last season, leading to a .772 RPH. Dozier is efficient too: For every 27 outs he made in 2014, he scored 6.3 runs, more than the \$240 million Robinson Cano or batting champ Jose Altuve. I'm not arguing that Dozier is a better player than those guys. I would suggest that he will provide far more value for your fantasy team, given that you can get him in Round 5 or 6 in a standard draft, versus Round 1 or 2 for the others.

Of course, any time you go fishing among low batting averages, you might catch a clunker who's about to collapse completely, like Dan Uggla in 2013. Buyer, beware. But some RPH leaders are coming off rough BABIP seasons—a metric that accounts for bad luck—and are due to see their batting averages (and hits) rebound, like Chris Davis (.739 RPH in 2014, second highest in MLB). Others benefit from their lineups, like Kole Calhoun (.672), who bats leadoff ahead of Trout. And for many, a high RPH indicates a breadth of skills that might surprise you, like Anthony Rendon (.631) or Brett Gardner (.613).

If you're looking for a keeper not named Dozier, check out Christian Yelich (.570). Last season he had 30 doubles, 70 walks and 21 steals, and he scored 94 runs for a Marlins club that's rapidly improving—and he's only 23. But for the moment, he's just the fourth most famous outfielder on his team. Whether at the diamond or at your fantasy draft, knowing how to find home plate deserves a little more respect.



## **Z**00M

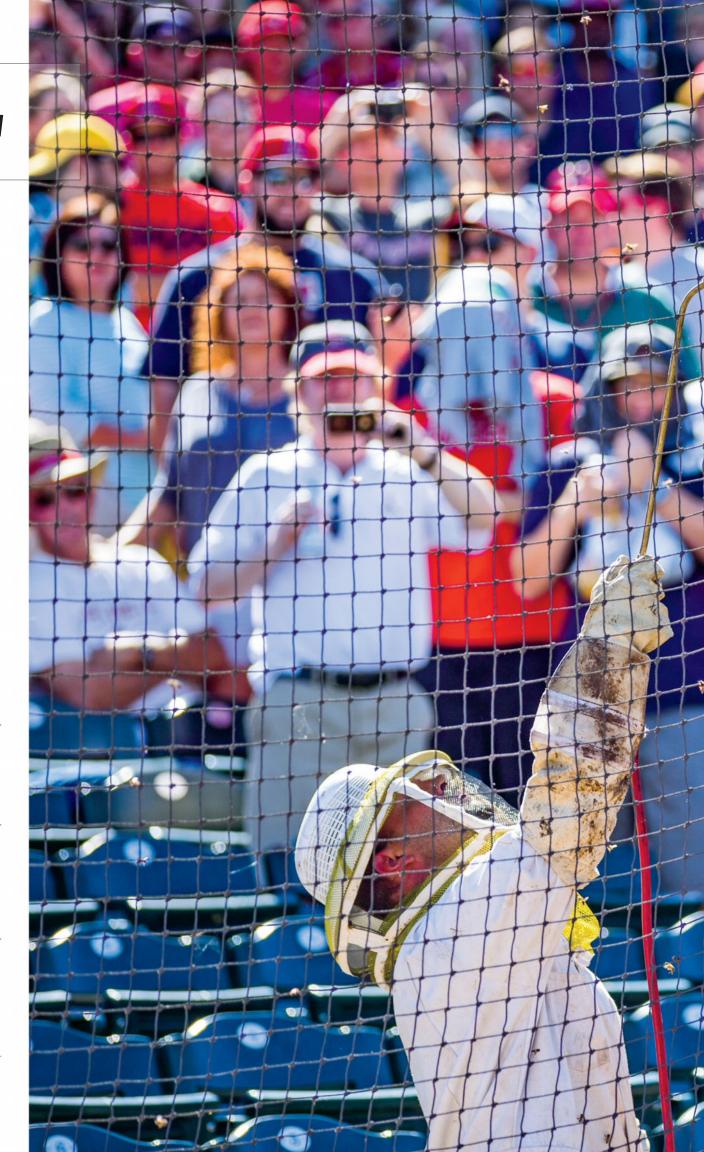
To bee or not to bee? That was the question at a recent Cactus League game between the Royals and Angels, when a large swarm invaded Tempe Diablo Stadium. Within an hour, the bees became a sea of troubles behind home plate, engulfing a microphone. And then an employee of a local pest control company took up arms and shuffled them off this mortal coil. Royals manager Ned Yost, who described it as a "mass bee genocide," said he would have preferred to see smoke used as part of a catchand-release method. But would he really lose the name of action and deny us so many cheap Hamlet references? (That's five and counting!] -ANTHONY OLIVIERI

Photograph by ROB TRINGALI

Estimated number of bees giving pause (six!) at Tempe Diablo.

Number of fans reported to suffer the sting of outrageous misfortune (seven!) that day.

Number of Angels farm teams named the Bees, no more. [That's eight. And we're out.]







## WHO

Blue Jays shortstop Jose Reyes and two of his daughters, Ashley, 8, and Joselin, 6

## WHAT

Reyes family at Walt Disney World

## WHEN

Jan. 29, 7:37 a.m. ET

## WHERE

Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique, Magic Kingdom, Lake Buena Vista, Florida

"This was our first stop at Disney, something called the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique, where fairy godmothers made our three youngest girls into princesses. Here we have Tiana and Sleeping Beauty—or maybe that's Belle. I don't know, man. Daddy does rides. My wife, Katherine, gets scared, so it's my job to take our four girls on the roller coasters. This time our youngest rode all the coasters with me, and she wasn't scared. I couldn't believe it. I'll do anything to see my girls happy, but I'll be honest with you: When we finally got to the hotel at 5 p.m., it felt like I just got done with a 10-hour doubleheader."

**—JOSE REYES**, as told to Sam Alipour

Photograph by CHIP LITHERLAND







## CONVERSATIONS ABOUT NOTHING IN PARTICULAR



Sometimes, the little things last the longest.







# 



## PERFECT STORM

THE HAWKS HAVE NO STARS, BUT FOUR ALL-STARS; NO 20-POINT SCORERS, BUT ELITE SHOOTERS. WE REVEAL THE PLAYS THAT MAKE THEIR OFFENSE SO LETHAL. By Amin Elhassan PLAYBOOK / NBA

During last year's NBA Finals, the Spurs bludgeoned the Heat with arguably the highest form of basketball ever—sublime playmaking, absurd perimeter shooting and lightning-quick passing that exhausted the finest player of a generation.

Apparently, the players and coaches of the Hawks have TVs, because they've employed that same starless, free-flowing offense to obliterate the Eastern Conference. Their efficiency owes a debt not only to coach Mike Budenholzer, a Spurs assistant for 17 seasons, but to the fact that many of the Hawks' plays are ripped straight from San Antonio's playbook. Atlanta's mastery of the offense is a testament to two characteristics both teams employ: wide-open spacing and shooting, shooting, shooting. Also: shooting. Here are three plays, directed by **Jeff Teague**, that illustrate what makes this Hawks offense so damn pretty—and so gosh-darn unguardable.



## **PLAY 1 RUB 4/5**

Employed by the Hawks in many end-ofquarter and end-of-game scenarios, this high pick-and-roll with one of the big men (A, B) discourages zone and help defenses. The Rub spreads shooters to the corners and features a second big man moving block to block (C). And for the likes of sliding sharpshooter Kyle Korver (D), it's all about that space, 'bout that space.

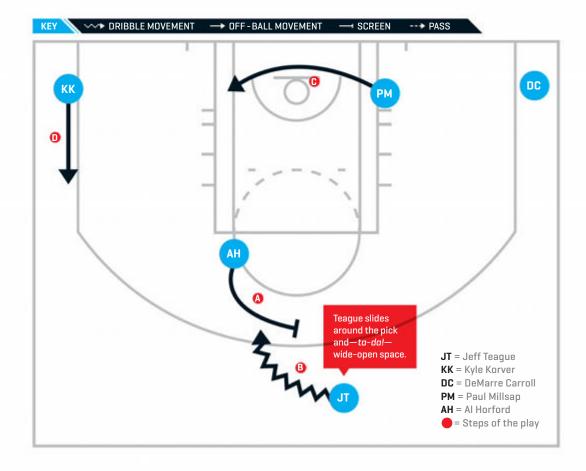
## MAN BY MAN

Jeff Teague is elite in pick-and-rolls, scoring .928 points per possession as the ball handler, placing him in the NBA's 88th percentile, per Synergy Sports.

DeMarre Carroll stands in the weakside corner, where he's shooting 45.2 percent. Carroll is a great kick-out option for Teague if the interior D collapses on him.

Paul Millsap slides from block to block, making it harder for defenses to help off him as Al Horford rolls to the other side of the paint. Kyle Korver lifts out of the corner, which discourages his defender from playing help D on a penetrating Teague. The reason? Korver is leading the league in 3-point shooting, jarring treys at a ridiculous rate of 49.2 percent.

Al Horford now has the space, and the single coverage, to maneuver as the roll man, a position from which he's scoring 1.34 points per possession in 2015, good for an elite 86th percentile in the NBA.





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## **PLAY 2 WEDGE ROLL**

Ripped from the playbook of Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, this two-man pick-and-roll [A, B] is designed to confuse the D into either overhelping (leaving Horford open as he rolls to the left baseline) or not helping at all (leaving Korver alone). Any help D on the driving Teague (C) results in shooters being a pass away from a wide-open trey. In other words, you can't win.

## MAN BY MAN

Korver sets the cross screen for Horford, then spaces out to the 3-point line, drawing attention away from the pick-and-roll.

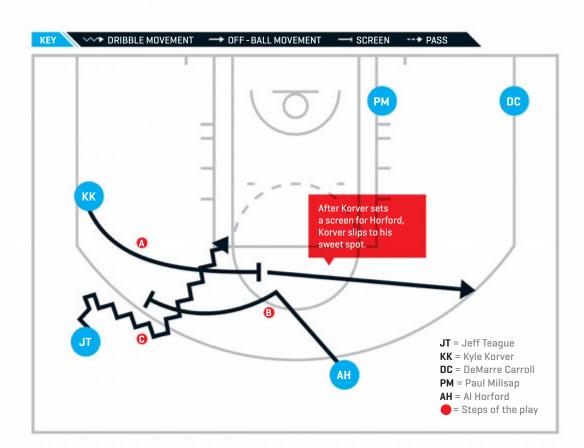
**Horford**, after setting his screen, rolls toward the left baseline, where he shoots 59.5 percent, a full 20 percentage points above the NBA average.

Teague must recognize if the help defense is coming, which could force him to lateral to either Carroll or

Korver, who shoots 49.5 percent from the right wing.

Millsap's weakside position forces his defender to choose: either help with Horford as he rolls, or stay, allowing isolation on the strong side.

Carroll's corner slot gives the Hawks options: Teague can drive and dish, or Korver can swing it if Horford's defender slides over after the initial screen.



## **PLAY 3 STRONG**

This play works because each starter is a shooting threat (a collective 39.7 percent from 3). It features possibly four passes (A), a screen by Millsap after his pass (B), a screen by Carroll after his pass (C) and a sliding big (D). It's not about spacing so much as the options it provides. And boy, does it provide a lot of those.

## MAN BY MAN

Teague can do so many things here: shoot off the screen from Millsap, hit Millsap as he rolls to the rim or fire a pass to Korver, who becomes open on the wing after a Carroll screen.

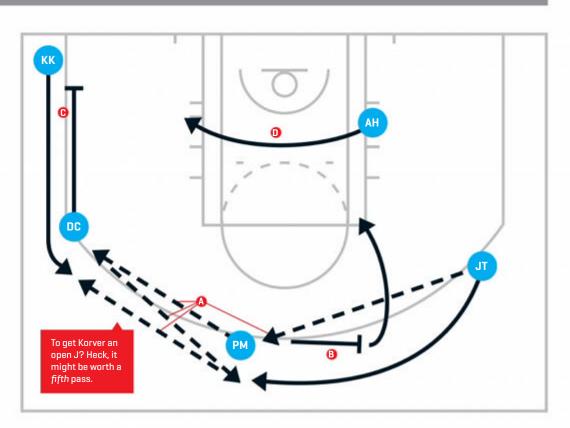
Millsap passes to Carroll, sets the screen for Teague, then rolls to the right elbow, recently exited by Horford, who slides to the other side of the paint.

Carroll sets the pin-down screen for Korver and stavs there, providing a pass-out

option for Teague. Carroll does, after all, make 46.2 percent from there.

Korver, having arguably the best shooting season in NBA history, sprints up the sideline for a catch-andshoot from the left wing. where a full 15 percent of his shots come from.

Horford slides to the other side of the paint, giving Millsap room to roll. He also presents another pick-androll chance, this time with Korver on the left wing



All stats through March 8.



## TECHNIQUE

## SPIRAL TAP: TY LAWSON ON HIS SPIN MOVE

It hasn't been a dream season for the Nuggets, but Ty Lawson is nonetheless giving defenders fits. Credit speed and elite ballhandling, including this deft spin move that the point guard put in his arsenal back in his high school days at Oak Hill Academy. "I added it to my game because it's really hard to guard," says the 27-year-old Lawson. "I'll do it against anybody. Except Mike Conley. He reads it too well. But it works so often that I almost always get an open shot off of it." The numbers agree. Through February, 83.8 percent of his 2-point field goals were unassisted, the seventh-highest rate in the NBA [minimum 30 games]. Here's how he creates his foolproof route to the rack. —ASHLEY MELFI

- $\boldsymbol{1}$  "When I bring the ball up, normally between half court and the 3-point line I'll give an in-and-out with the ball to shift the defender. It's bait to make him bite in that direction."
- 3 "I'll lower my left shoulder and give a little bump to my defender if I need more space. The bump allows me to spin off my man and create a path toward the basket."
- 2 "I control the ball by keeping my left hand on top of it through the movement. I spin off my right foot so my man thinks I'm going left, but then I start to spin."
- **4** "Once I know my shoulders are past the defender, I collect the ball with my right, gather myself and my feet, and go to the basket to complete the layup."



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## FLAIR TACTICS

Twenty excruciating laps in roughly 20 minutes? Ryan Dungey makes a supercross race look like a joy ride. The Monster Energy Supercross points leader through 10 events, Dungey was averaging 57.341 seconds per lap. While no two tracks are the same throughout the four-month season (next stop: March 21 in Detroit), the techniques the 25-year-old uses to win remain constant. Here he gives us the dirt on his five most crucial rules. —BRETT SMITH

### **BE FIRST OFF THE LINE**

Getting the holeshot is probably 50 to 60 percent of the battle. It's where you can pass all 21 riders in one straightaway. In a bad start, you're catching up with the leaders the whole race. So to avoid that you have to be focused on that gate. As soon as it moves, your reaction time has to be split second. Go! But it's not just dump the clutch and twist the throttle. You have to be smooth with the clutch, easy with the throttle, and you have to stay over the front of the bike.

### **EASY ON THE CORNERS**

Corners are where we can make up the most time, but they have a fine balance. You can come into them so hard that you upset the bike's suspension and you pretty much come to a stop in the middle, losing momentum. But if you let the bike catch up, follow the bumps and stay off the brakes, you can give up a little bit to make more. The thing that has stuck with me is that it's not the rider who races into the corners the hardest but the rider who slows down the least.

### **MASTER THE WHOOPS**

Riders of all skill levels agree that whoops are the toughest feature: They separate the field. Your bike teeter-totters over the whoops, and you have to hit every one with your front wheel first and your rear wheel next-10 to 12 whoops, one after another. If you're too slow and don't get on top of the whoop with the speed you want, vou lose time. But if you come in too fast and hit your front wheel into the middle of a whoop, you'd better hang on for a wild ride.

### **PASS WITH CARE**

If the rider you are trying to pass is going the same speed, it can be hard to even get up close. Other times he makes a mistake and you're able to get in front of him. Moments like that require split-second thinking and instinct. But you often have to set someone up a whole lap ahead of time. You have to pick the point where you're stronger than he is on the track-and you make sure you're right on his wheel-and then make your move.

### **RIDE WIDE OPEN**

It's important to ride with all-out intensity and speed. You pick five laps and you go as hard as you can, and then you settle in. If you can open a gap in the beginning, then you can go from 100 percent to 90 percent. But sometimes you can't shake a rider. You have to break them mentally and physically by sprinting longer. Pretty soon Lap 11 comes around and he has lost a little time. Lap 12, he's farther back. Then you know you've broken him.

## SOME BARRIERS ARE MADE TO BE BROKEN.



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## MASTERS PREVIEW

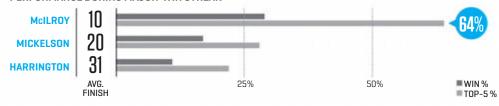
## THE FIRST IS IN THE FIVES

When Rory McIlroy steps to the first tee at Augusta National on April 9, he'll be riding one hell of a hot streak. Through March 8, McIlroy had compiled as many first- or second-place finishes (eight) in his past 14 events as defending Masters champ Bubba Watson had in his past 53. This matters. A McIlroy victory at Augusta would mean history on two fronts: He'd become the first golfer since Tiger Woods to win three consecutive majors and the first since—you guessed it—Woods to complete the career grand slam. Can McIlroy claim a third leg in his quest for the Rory Slam? Let's pace it off. —SCOTT T. MILLER

## 1 HE'S HOT ENOUGH

Since Woods' run of four straight major championships in 2000 and 2001, only three other players have gone back-to-back in majors: Phil Mickelson, Padraig Harrington and now McIlroy. Of those three, Rory is on by far the hottest run, having finished top-eight in seven of his past 10 events. Phil and Paddy did that five times combined in the 10 events leading up to their tries at a third straight major.

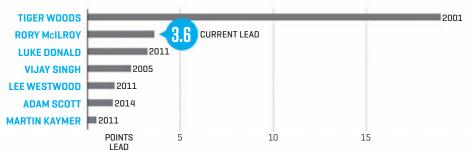
### PERFORMANCE DURING MAJOR-WIN STREAK\*



## 2 HE'S GOOD ENOUGH

How dominant has McIlroy been? Consider that his 3.6-point lead in the World Golf Rankings is wider than the gap between the No. 2 player [Watson] and the No. 16 player [Patrick Reed]. In fact, McIlroy's current rankings gap (see below) surpasses the largest leads, since 2001, by each of the five No. 1s not named Tiger Woods—who held a Secretariat-like separation from the field in May 2001.

### LARGEST LEAD FOR EACH NO. 1 PLAYER, SINCE 2001

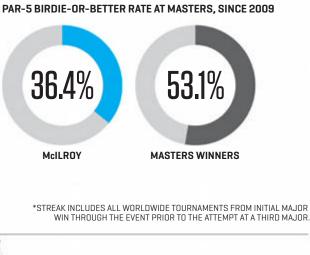


## 3 SO IT WILL ALL COME DOWN TO THIS

Here's a fun fact: McIlroy, in six tries at Augusta, has never finished higher than eighth. Why can't he master the Masters? It's his play on the crucial par 5s (see below). Indeed, since McIlroy became a staple on the PGA Tour in 2010, there's been no better indicator of his overall play than his birdie-or-better rate on par 5s. In the 2010 and '13 PGA Tour seasons, he ranked 154th and 71st in that metric and won just once in 32 events. In 2012 and '14, he ranked first and third and won seven times, including three majors. There are four par 5s at Augusta: the 2nd, 8th, 13th and 15th. If McIlroy is making birdies on those, call the tailor. The kid's gonna need a green jacket.

FROM LEFT: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; PETER MORRISON/AP IMAGES

### PAR-5 BIRDIE-OR-BETTER RATE AT MASTERS, SINCE 2009





Want to be a star? Answer the following question: Who will win the Masters, and why? One reader will get to see his or her response alongside those of two of our SportsCenter anchors in the April 13 issue of ESPN The Maaazine. Go to facebook.com/sportscenter, use #SC3Stars and post your 50-word response.



# The Thrill of Hictory

The V Foundation has cause to celebrate. With the generous support of ESPN fans, sponsors and our donors, we raised more than \$2.2 MILLION for cancer research during V Week 2014. Thank you for joining us in our mission to defeat cancer for good.

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## 7 WAYS TO BEAT KENTUCKY

The Wildcats are not invincible. After all, they were tied after 40 minutes against Ole Miss and Texas A&M, had to survive a last-second 3-point attempt to beat LSU and trailed Georgia with four minutes left. So how do you convert their weaknesses into a W? We turned to seven NBA scouts and execs who've analyzed UK extensively for a topple-worthy tourney plan. We're not saying it'll be easy; we're just saying it can be done. —JORDAN BRENNER

## 1 ABANDON ZONE FOR PACK-LINE D

Kentucky's D is special. Its offense? Merely very good. Yes, the Wildcats rank eighth in the nation in adjusted offensive efficiency, at 118.6 points per 100 possessions. But, says one scout, "they've thrown up some stinkers on the offensive end." To create

those stinkers, some pros advocate going to a zone against Kentucky, which might be more effective in disrupting UK's rhythm but also makes rebounding more difficult. (The Wildcats grab offensive rebounds on 40.3 percent of their misses.) "Sometimes I think their best offense is getting a shot up and just letting their

size and athletes go get it," one scout says. That's why others prefer a pack-line style of man-to-man D, which makes it easier to box out after a missed shot. A contain-and-contest scheme also helps opponents find SF Devin Booker and G Aaron Harrison—the Wildcats' two main deep threats—and run them off the 3-point line.

### **GOOD NEWS FOR:**

**VIRGINIA**, which has perfected pack-line D, so it wouldn't have to change its approach at all.

**ARIZONA**, which plays a similar man-to-man system and has the size to compete on the boards.

UTAH. Its disciplined athletes have what it takes to make the Cats work for points.

**28** ESPN The Magazine 03/30/2015



## **TEMPT THE** HARRISON TWINS

It's fair to say the NBA scouts we consulted aren't too fond of the Harrisons. Many suggested backing off of them and simply trying to encourage them to do things that lose games. Andrew, the point guard, turns the ball over on 20.6 percent of possessions, and Aaron, known as the shooter, has hit just 29.4 percent of his 3-pointers. "You want the Harrisons taking those 5-to-10-foot shots they like," one scout says. "Especially Andrew-if he takes 20 shots and hits 10 and you lose, I think you live with that rather than giving up 20 offensive rebounds and open looks to Devin Booker." Scouts also question their movement and recommend giving them driving angles that let them make bad decisions. For Kentucky as a whole: "Force them to play as individuals, take specific players away and reduce them to a two-man team," a scout says. Encouraging the Harrisons to assume the roles of co-heroes just might cause Kentucky to self-destruct ... until John Calipari rolls with Tyler Ulis and Booker in their place.

## **GOOD NEWS FOR:**

VILLANOVA. With a cadre of tough guards, Nova is capable of getting into Kentucky's heads.

BUTLER, which backs down to no one. [See G Roosevelt Jones' trash-talking game.)

WICHITA STATE and its veteran, talented backcourt that wants tourney revenge

## DON'T HELP IN THE POST

UK's bigs aren't refined low-post scorers. Karl-Anthony Towns shoots 49.3 percent on post-up plays, but Dakari Johnson (37.7 percent) and Willie Cauley-Stein (41.2 percent) are less effective on those shots. "Those guys are all trying to finish over their left shoulder, so if you can force them over their right, you've got something," one scout says. Cauley-Stein and Johnson, in particular, are more effective scoring off teammates' penetration or offensive rebounds. Yet if they see single coverage, they'll want to exploit it. That's a better option for the defense than sending a second defender to help, which would free UK's other post player to run wild on the offensive glass, or sending a guard and leaving a 3-point shooter open. Still, this strategy comes with two caveats: Defenders must push UK's bigs off the block. And Towns might require a double-team, or the threat of one to confuse him. But if an opponent can defend without fouling and force Kentucky to score two points at a time, that's a win for the D.

## **GOOD NEWS FOR:**

ARIZONA. Kaleb Tarczewski and Brandon Ashley can hold their own against UK's giants.

LSU. Big men Jarell Martin and Jordan Mickey nearly spurred an upset in February.

**GONZAGA** and its post rotation of Przemek Karnowski, Domantas Sabonis and ex-Cat Kyle Wiltjer.

## SPOT-UP SHOOTING 100% **DEVIN BOOKER DON'T IGNORE THE PERIMETER** The Harrison twins' spot-up shooting is streaky, but you'd better close out on SF Devin Booker. on 108 FGA ANDREW **HARRISON** 36.2 TREY LYLES on 69 FGA FG% on 62 FGA **AARON HARRISON TEAM AVERAGE** on 151 FGA 25%

## **RUN! BUT DON'T RUSH** (AND FIND AN EASY SHOT)

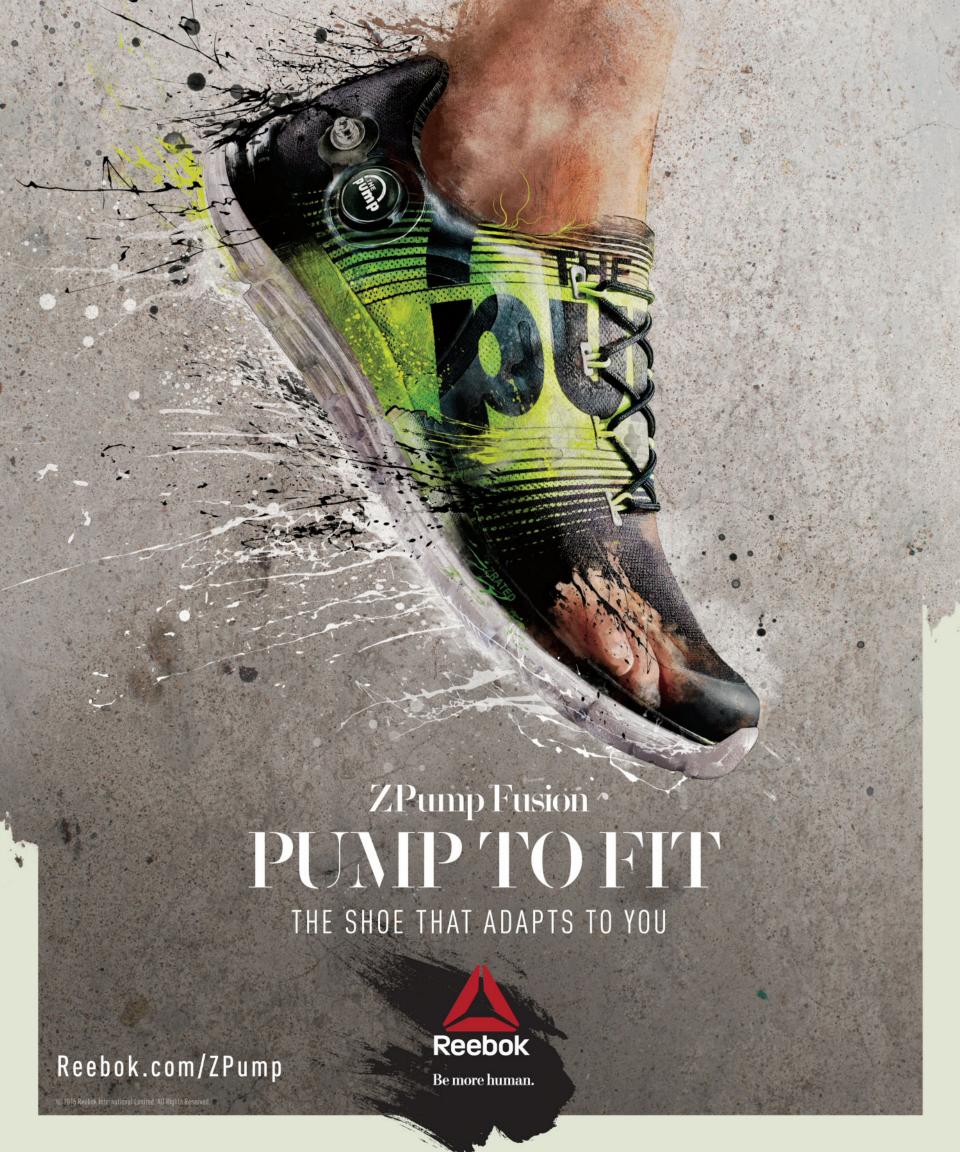
Get a stop on D and corral the rebound ... then what? "Push," one scout says. "The first clean look you get is probably the best shot." However, cautions another, "Slow it down and minimize possessions." There is no sight more frightening in college ball than UK's half-court defense. The Wildcats allow just 85.1 points per 100 possessions, block 18.7 percent of opponents' 2-point shots and hold teams to a ridiculous 39.4 effective field goal percentage. The best shots are generally available in transition. So the answer is a compromise: Push the ball up the court and look for an easy basket. If it's not there, pull the ball back out and work the clock.

### **GOOD NEWS FOR:**

**DUKE**. G Tyus Jones knows when to push and when to reset.

NORTH CAROLINA, which scored 70 off 67 possessions against UK in December.

IOWA STATE, which loves to run but can also play through F Georges Niang.



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## FUN SCREENS, LOTS OF THEM

The Harrisons are in the crosshairs yet again, this time for their defensive weaknesses, along with forward Trey Lyles. "You can drive them—no question," one scout says. That's true on the pick-androll too. Scouts suggest running bundles of ball screens against the Harrisons and Lyles and using whomever Johnson or Towns is guarding as the screener. The key is avoiding Cauley-Stein, who is quick enough to switch onto a guard-and shut him down. "He's going to cause a lot of havoc," says a scout.

### **GOOD NEWS FOR:**

NOTRE DAME. The Irish lead the nation with 1.08 points per nick-and-roll.

WISCONSIN and Frank Kaminsky, who can burn UK with his 3-point shooting.

**GONZAGA**. The Bulldogs have multiple high-level options for ball handlers and screeners.

## 🣭 KICK BACK OUT FOR 3s

The Wildcats don't worry finish at the rim has to face their army of shot blockers. Attempting to score over those guys is a fool's errand. Instead, the proper play is to kick the ball back out, puts it, "you have to make a preponderant number of But that's the type of high-risk/high-reward style teams should employ when trying to trigger an upset.

### **GOOD NEWS FOR:**

NOTRE DAME, which plays this style all day and hits 39 percent of its 3-point shots.

**DUKE**. With Justise Winslow at PF, Duke can surround Jahlil Okafor with drivers and shooters.

VILLANOVA. It takes 42.5 percent of its shots from downtown-and hits 38.3 percent.

much about dribble penetration because anyone trying to hopefully for a 3-pointer. That takes poise, and, as one scout 3-pointers over their length."

## **GET BACK FAST**

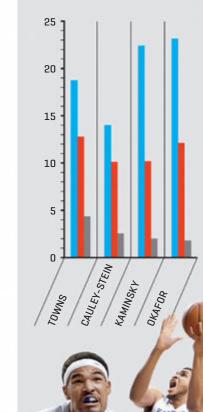
Kentucky doesn't play as fast as it should. The Wildcats average 63.8 possessions per game (231st in the country), and though some of that is because opposing offenses can take forever to find a clean look, the Cats don't make transition offense a priority. Opponents can't abandon the offensive boards, but the priority should be preventing a fast break. Advises one scout, "You have to create a rule on who goes and who doesn't." Do that-and everything else on this list-and a team will have a chance against the Wildcats. As one scout says, "They're not invincible. Hell no.

All stats through March 10.

## **WOODEN-WORTHY?**

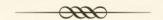
Kentucky's depth has depressed its players' stats. But on a per-40-minute basis, big men Karl-Anthony Towns and Willie Cauley-Stein hold their own against Wooden Award front-runners Frank Kaminsky and Jahlil Okafor.

- PTS/40 MIN
- REB/40 MIN
- BLK/40 MIN



## **AND THWART BREAKS**

But to beat them, it's going to take a special set of circumstances."



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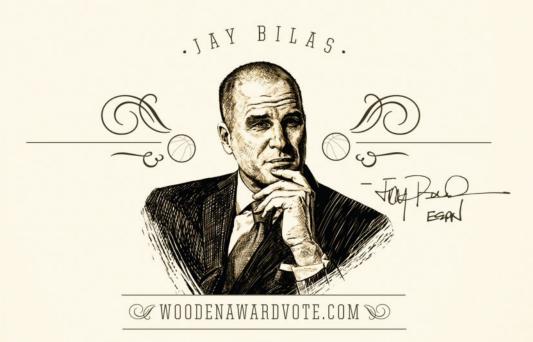
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WELL-ROUNDED GAME







## SCOUTTAKES

## **CATCHING FIRE**

Ever since he broke out at the combine, Kevin White has been touted as an early first-rounder. But is the receiver worthy of the hype? We asked an NFL scout for his report on the 21-year-old out of West Virginia, then gave our panel of expertsand White—a chance to chime in.

### **KEVIN WHITE**

HEIGHT 6-3	WEIGHT 215	
<b>REC</b> * 109	YDS 1,447	<b>TD</b> s 10
	*8	TATS FROM 2014

## THE SCOUT

Physically, he's got what you want size, speed, hands, competitiveness.1 But like most big guys, he's not going to make his living with his quickness.2 So he's going to have to work on bump and run, and on releasing versus an NFL corner.3 He's probably got better time speed than play speed,4 but they're both really good. 5 He's a good kid, good worker and good leader. But because he was a juco transfer and a nonqualifier out of high school, he's going to have to show that he has the ability to understand, repeat and make changes.6 I think he has that in him, but he's going to have to convince people in the league.7



## **CLIMBING** THE MOUNTAIN

Why is White suddenly a top-five talent? He paired his impressive on-field stats with an elite nerformance at the NFL combine.



## **RUNNING FOR IT** YAC, 2014 Kevin White West Virginia

Mario Alford West Virginia

Jakeem Grant

## STRENGTH IN **NUMBERS**

White's 23 reps on the bench press at the combine was tied for first among WRs with Sammie Coates (Auburn) and Geremy Davis (Connecticut).

## THE FASTEST WIDEOUTS

40-yard dash, 2015 combine

J.J. Nelson UAB	4.28
Phillip Dorsett Miami (Fla.)	4.33
Kevin White West Virginia	4.35

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# THE RANDAGE OF SILENT STAN

STAN KROENKE'S SCHEME TO MOVE HIS RAMS TO L.A. HAS SPARKED NFL CHAOS— AND PUT THE RECLUSIVE OWNER IN AN UNFAMILIAR POSITION: THE SPOTLIGHT.

### BY DAVID FLEMING

THE FIRST PIECE of property Stan Kroenke ever cared about sits abandoned now, perched on the edge of an endless swath of farmland, sinking into the thick coffee-colored soil of central Missouri. Some of the original charm of Enos Stanley Kroenke's quaint childhood home in Mora (population: 424) remains intact. The green front door still features an old-fashioned brass and porcelain doorbell crank. The intricate wood detailing under the roof eaves has survived. But after years of neglect by the current owners, who converted the old water well into a TV antenna, any gust of wind can scatter giant flakes of gray house paint across the overgrown landscaping. "It was a beautiful little farmhouse at one time," whispers a neighbor. "It's not now."

Kroenke, the multibillionaire real estate developer and owner of the St. Louis Rams, once recounted how he used to sit on the narrow front porch here and, as the summer sun set behind the corn, soak in the faint, scratchy radio broadcasts of the St. Louis Cardinals with his father and grandfather. Alvin Kroenke so loved the Cardinals that he named his eldest son after two of





### THE MAN BEHIND THE (MAYBE) MOVE



# \$6.3B

The size of Rams owner Stan Kroenke's fortune, thanks to his real estate and sports empire. In addition to the Rams, he owns Arsenal, the Denver Nuggets, the Colorado Avalanche and MLS's Colorado Rapids.

# \$1.86B

The price tag for the proposed privately financed stadium in Inglewood, California, where Kroenke is seeking to move the Rams. It would be the most expensive stadium in U.S. history.



# \$985M

The cost of the stadium, including \$400 million in public financing, that Missouri politicians are proposing to keep the Rams in St. Louis. The deal, subject to a vote, would require Rams fans to pony up and help Kroenke—not exactly Mr. Popular in town right now.

photograph by GREGG SEGAL 03/30/2015 ESPN The Magazine 37

the team's homegrown Hall of Famers: the hardworking Enos "Country" Slaughter and the quiet, humble effortless hitter Stan "the Man" Musial.

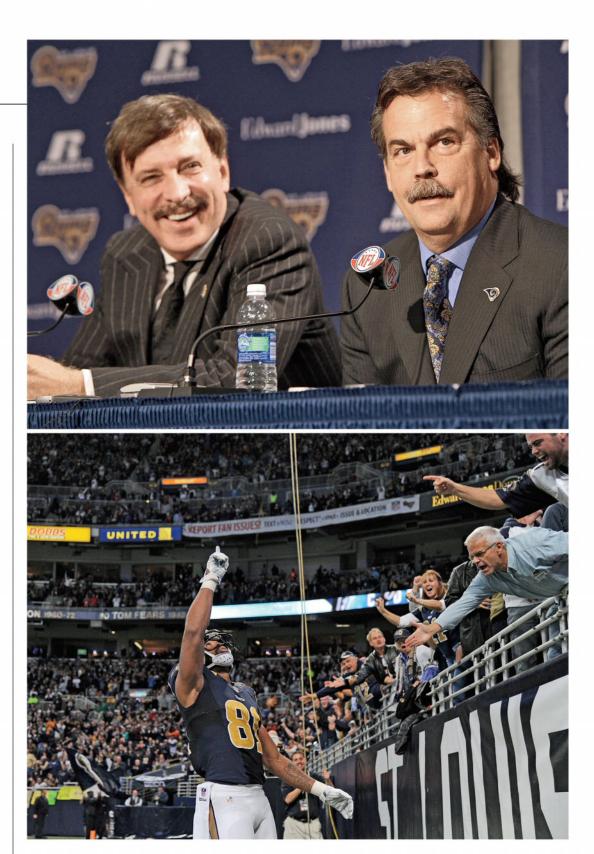
Today, though, the family's once idyllic front porch is full of gaping holes in its weatherworn floorboards. And Missourians fear that Kroenke's relationship with his native state is falling into similar disrepair.

Since January, the reclusive Kroenke, 67, has been maneuvering his NFL team west, out of Missouri and into what would be the crown jewel of his massive real estate development and sports empire: a proposed 80,000-seat NFL stadium in Inglewood, California, with a space-age retractable roof, open-air sides and a U.S.-record \$1.86 billion budget.

Five decades after he left Mora, Kroenke has amassed a net worth of \$6.3 billion, according to Forbes, and through his array of vineyards, ranches and strip malls, many of them anchored by Wal-Mart, he has become the eighth-largest landowner in the United States. All the while, he has collected sports franchises like vintage cars. Besides the Rams, he owns the English Premier League team Arsenal, valued at \$1.3 billion, the Denver Nuggets, the Colorado Avalanche, MLS's Colorado Rapids, the Colorado Mammoth of the National Lacrosse League and Denver's Pepsi Center, where he maintains a 12,000-square-foot penthouse apartment on the top two floors, complete with a theater, a gym and pristine views of the Rockies.

Most of these, however, would become secondary knickknacks if Kroenke is indeed the man who brings the NFL back to Los Angeles after a 20-year absence in the nation's secondlargest media market. The move would immediately triple the value of the Rams (from an NFL-low \$930 million in St. Louis, according to Forbes, to as much as \$3 billion in LA) while making himself arguably the most powerful owner in sports. It could also transform the intensely private man, described by a family friend as "Midwestern, through and through," into both the Art Modell of Missouri and the king of La La Land.

How Kroenke pursues his LA dream, then, will not only shape his legacy but the entire landscape of the NFL. The league had seemed intent on carefully orchestrating its eventual



For the 2012 hiring of coach Jeff Fisher, Kroenke made a rare media appearance. Equally rare of late? Home highlights. This Kenny Britt TD against Denver on Nov. 16 led to one of just three wins at the Edward Jones Dome last year.





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grand return to LA while continuing to use the city as leverage in a handful of other stadium negotiations. Until, that is, Kroenke cranked up the heat with his extraordinary Hollywoodstyle power play-one as intriguing and audacious as the enigmatic, mustachioed billionaire at the center of it all.

Kroenke hasn't spoken a word since the story of his relocation plans broke on Jan. 5, which is not the least bit surprising. The owner speaks publicly so infrequently that he's been dubbed Silent Stan in St. Louis, a moniker his PR rep disputed as unfair just before turning down The Magazine's interview request. When you ask NFL insiders about Kroenke, you hear a lot of descriptions like "eccentric" and "reclusive." While he is respected, and liked, in league circles, even those closest to the Rams' owner don't seem to know him very well. "What makes Stan Kroenke tick ... are you serious?" says a friend. "I have no earthly idea."

Right now, striking it rich in LA seems to be motivating a handful of other NFL power brokers too. On Feb. 19, the Raiders and Chargers, unhappy with their own stadium situations, announced a joint plan to build a \$1.7 billion stadium on a 168-acre parcel in Carson, California. Entertainment giant AEG, which had an agreement with Los Angeles to build an NFL stadium next to the city's

convention center, provided it could attract a franchise, also had its hat in the ring before dropping out on March 10.

Meanwhile, back in St. Louis, civic leaders have already countered with a \$985 million stadium project, a deal they hope is rich enough to persuade, or force, Kroenke to stay home. Even so, most NFL insiders consider Kroenke the clear front-runner in the race to win the West. "The only thing that's moved the ball in LA has been Stan," Mark Fabiani, the Chargers' special counsel on stadium issues, told ESPN.com recently. "He changed the world."

So now, after 20 years of bluffs and empty promises in Los Angeles, the NFL's Hollywood soap opera suddenly has three teams and roughly \$4.5 billion in new stadium proposals. It is sure to be the hot topic March 22-25 in Phoenix, where league owners convene for their annual meeting.

And all of it ignited by the most unlikely of leading men.

ABOUT 200 MILES west of St. Louis, out behind the old family farmhouse where the road transitions from concrete to dirt, stands the Mora Lumber Co., built and owned by Alvin Kroenke. Stan started working there at 10. Each day after Lutheran school he'd sweep floors and help with the books, quietly correcting

the mistakes he found. By the time he was a tall, lanky teenager and standout athlete at nearby Cole Camp High, Kroenke was part of the work crew that met at 7 a.m. sharp on the Rock Island Railroad platform to unload hundreds of 1-by-12 planks of lumber and 94-pound sacks of cement. If the cars weren't cleared in 48 hours, the railroad company would assess a surcharge—something the elder Kroenke simply would not abide. "That kind of work is not for the faint of heart," says Eldon Harms, 82, who worked alongside Stan and later bought the business when Alvin retired. (Both his parents are deceased.) "We had younger guys working with us who could always find something else to be doing besides lifting those bags of cement. But not Stan. Heck of a good kid. Whenever we got a break, Stan would be over behind the house, shooting baskets."

As a painfully shy, skinny 6-foot-2 senior forward with a high-rise black pompadour, Kroenke developed a fluid, vertical jumper, a quick trigger and, on the court at least, a little flair for the dramatic. On fast breaks during home games, teammates say, he liked to set up on the left wing just a few feet in front of Cole Camp's 200-student pep section. The team finished below .500 his senior year, but near the end of the season Kroenke heated up, notching

# **CALIFORNIA**

Bills, Vikings and Jaguars fans know them well: rampant rumors that their team is moving to LA. Since the Rams and Raiders fled the region in 1995, NFL owners have used the threat of heading west to wring better stadium deals from their cities. Here, an abbreviated history. —DOUG MITTLER

#### 1996

Seattle owner Ken Behring announces he's moving his team, and the Seahawks even begin training at the Rams' old facility in Anaheim. After six weeks, threats of NFI fines force him back to Seattle.

#### 1999

The NFL awards LA an expansion franchise, provided the city can come up with a stadium deal and an ownership group. Ha. Instead, the Houston Texans are born.

#### 2002

The Colts deny LA rumors. "We have to be careful; LA may be bigger than [owner] Jim Irsay can chew on," an NFL official warns. Three years later, the Colts aet \$620M in public funding for a new stadium in Indy.

#### 2005

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina. rumors swirl that the Saints may relocate to San Antonio or Los Angeles, but thencommissioner Paul Tagliabue pressures the team to stay in New Orleans.

#### 2007

Per their deal with the city of San Diego, the Chargers now have the annual option to terminate their lease. Relocation rumors percolate.

#### 2011

Billionaire Shad Khan buys the alwaysrumored-tobe-movina Jaguars and declares himself "totally committed to Jacksonville." So far. so good

#### 2012

Vikings-to-LA rumors: a tradition since 1995. The Vikings end the chatter with a deal-good for \$498M in public stadium fundina-to stay in Minnesota.

#### 2014

Rams owner Stan Kroenke confirms he purchased 60 acres of land in Inglewood. setting the latest LA drama in motion.

The Buffalo News reports that California

billionaire Eli Broad, seeking to lure the Bills west, signed a nondisclosure agreement to see the team's financials. On second thought.

Broad punts.

team up on a \$1.7 billion stadium proposal in Carson, putting them in direct competition with Kroenke.

2015

The Raiders

and Chargers

a 22-point game followed by 33 points against Leeton, a school record that stood for more than a decade.

After he bought the Rams in 2010, Kroenke told a reporter in Columbia that once he realized he couldn't play for a professional sports team, he decided he wanted to own one instead. "Stan was very studious, very smart and not very outgoing-I mean you can see that even today," says high school teammate and friend William Smart, who in his 46 years at Cole Camp has been both principal and athletic director. "If I'm being honest, there was never a time in high school when we all said, 'Oh that Stan Kroenke is going to be very, very successful one day."

**KROENKE'S FORTUNES** took off with a chance meeting while he was at the University of Missouri. In 1971, on a ski trip to Aspen, Colorado, he met Ann Walton, a nursing student at Mizzou and the daughter of Wal-Mart co-founder Bud Walton. "Kroenke made his money the old-fashioned way," says Scott Rosner, a sports business professor at the Wharton School who often lectures on Kroenke, "He married it."

Ann, who is worth \$5.3 billion on her own, according to Forbes, is far less a mystery than her husband. "She is warm, friendly and so down-toearth," says UTEP athletic director Bob Stull, a former Missouri football coach who was close with

the couple in the 1990s. Attending an event at the Rams' practice facility, Ann once famously parked on the far side of the lot, telling a security guard that her daddy always taught her the spots up close were for customers. The couple married in 1974 and have two children, Whitney, 37, a documentary film producer in California, and Josh, 34, who played hoops at Missouri and is now vice president of the Nuggets. (Josh technically controls both the Nuggets and the Avalanche because of an NFL rule prohibiting certain cross-sports ownership.)

Just before marrying Ann, Kroenke earned his MBA and was awarded a paid fellowship to earn his Ph.D. But as gifted a student as he was, Kroenke knew his future was in strip malls rather than lecture halls. He left academia and went to work for Missouri real estate developer Raul Walters, who built some of Wal-Mart's first stores, making multimillion-dollar land deals often sealed with Sam Walton, Ann's uncle, on nothing more than a handshake. By 1979, Kroenke and Walters were partners in a company that had developed more than 20

retail malls across the Midwest. They implemented what would become Kroenke's basic, and wildly successful, business model: Buy huge parcels of relatively cheap land, build an anchor store, then watch the surrounding real estate exponentially increase in value.

It was a nice run, but Kroenke and Walters had a falling-out in 1985 and spent the next few years in a bitter court battle over how to divide the company's holdings. Coming off that unpleasantness, Kroenke forged a new partnership in 1991 with an old friend, Michael Staenberg, co-founding THF (To Have Fun) Realty, a nationwide real estate development company. Kroenke spent much of the next decade close to home in Columbia, where the voracious reader and health fanatic ran 3 to 6 miles most mornings with a group of men that included Stull, then Missouri's football coach. "He was focused, bright, no-nonsense and disciplined—that's a good word to describe Stan: disciplined," says Stull. "Stan was not one of those guys who would be slogging along, joking around, just happy to finish. He was

> very, very competitive and always at the front at the end of our runs."

> > Kroenke, who looked to Bud and Sam Walton as early mentors, served on Wal-Mart's board of directors from 1995 to 2000. And over the next two decades, THF grew into a \$2 billion company by developing more than 100



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# "HE'S GOT THE LAND AND HE'S GOT THE MONEY. STAN'S GUNS ARE LOADED."

AN NEL EXECUTIVE

strip malls and shopping centers, many of them, again, anchored by Wal-Marts. But in early 2013, the buddies who initially just wanted To Have Fun were at each other's throats. They ended their partnership in St. Louis County Court. Along with a variety of disputes regarding the breakup of their company, the two multibillionaires fought over items as relatively small as a \$250,000 fitness center lease. Kroenke even accused Staenberg of locking him out of THF's computer system.

By then, Kroenke was already scooping up every sports franchise he could get his hands on—a quest, it's been suggested, rooted in a

desire to prove that his empire wasn't built through matrimony alone.

His dynasty, however, started with a valuable lesson about the inner workings of the NFL. In 1993, when the league expanded, Kroenke was persuaded at the 11th hour to try to save the pitch of a potential ownership group in St. Louis. The unwieldy bunch, which included a host of local businessmen as well as Hall of Fame running back Walter Payton, was beset by big egos and infighting and in danger of falling apart. Just days before they were due to present the NFL with their plan, Kroenke was brought on to provide stability—and money. "With Kroenke in the picture, St. Louis seems

almost sure to get 21 of the 28 required votes from the club owners," *The New York Times* reported. But according to Jeff Pearlman's book *Sweetness*, when the NFL heard the pitch, it was a disaster. Roger Goodell, then a league vice president, reacted by telling them, "Get this s--- together. This is ridiculous. You're there if you can cut the squabbling."

They couldn't. The owners were equally underwhelmed by Kroenke and his group. The teams were awarded to Charlotte and Jacksonville—a city, as Pearlman notes, one-eighth the size of St. Louis and the 55th-largest television market.

It was a rare and embarrassing misstep that didn't sit well with the proud and hypercompetitive Kroenke. It was also another lesson in the dangers of finicky partners. "He made the presentation and the NFL kind of looked at Stan like, 'Who is this guy?'" says Stull. "Nobody knew him."

From then on, Kroenke would make sure they did.

## Two irresistible flavors



IN 1995, KROENKE paid \$80 million for 40 percent of the Rams when they moved from Los Angeles to St. Louis, with the guarantee that if the rest of the team ever went up for sale he'd have first dibs. In 2010, that opportunity arrived: He spent \$450 million to purchase the remaining 60 percent of the team from the heirs of former longtime Rams owner Georgia Frontiere. "I'm born and raised in Missouri," Kroenke told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* at the time. "I've been a Missourian for 60 years. People in our state know me. People know I can be trusted. People know I am an honorable guy."

For Kroenke Sports Enterprises, though, success has always seemed less about connections to home or even W's and more about the dogged pursuit of profits extracted from, in real estate parlance, "the dirt"—the land under everyone's feet. According to Rosner, the Wharton professor, Kroenke's level of immersion in sports ownership is unprecedented. It's not just horizontal, across several sports and

continents, but vertical as well, from the billion-dollar stadiums down to the broadcasting rights and ticket fees. Rosner divides owners into two categories: "win maximizers" like Mark Cuban and Jerry Jones, who are in it largely for the ego kick, and "profit maximizers" like Kroenke, who are in it because sports teams turn huge profits. "Where would you rather be?" asks Rosner. "St. Louis, where the market for your sport has historically been average, or LA, where the valuation of your business would skyrocket to \$3 billion, easy? You go to LA. You'd be a fool not to."

Rather than relying on the NFL to micromanage the LA market or, worse, anoint a beneficiary the owners deem worthy, Kroenke has forced the league's hand and triggered a land rush. On Jan. 5, the *Los Angeles Times* first reported that Kroenke, who already owned 60 acres near the Forum in Inglewood (purchased from Wal-Mart in 2014), had teamed with Stockbridge Capital Group to build an 80,000-seat NFL stadium as part of an

enormous complex on the 300-acre Hollywood Park site. The deal made Kroenke the first and only NFL owner of an existing team to own land in LA. He's had his eye on this spot since as early as 2012, when potential Rams employees were asked about a franchise move during interviews. Later in January, he got even more aggressive, converting his stadium lease in St. Louis to a year-to-year deal, which means the Rams could be free to leave town as early as 2016. "He's got the land and he's got the money," says one NFL exec. "Stan's guns are loaded."

Kroenke's expansive plan for the site, which includes retail, residential, office and hotel space as well as a 6,000-seat theater, perfectly aligns with his well-honed business model: For his anchor tenant, he has simply replaced the Wal-Mart with an NFL stadium. It's also precisely the kind of splashy statement the NFL has always had in mind for its return to Los Angeles. What's more, Kroenke's vow to privately finance the project garnered tremendous support in cash-strapped Inglewood,

# under 200 calories.

I don't like the way people are looking at us.



where on Feb. 24 the city council voted unanimously to approve the \$1.86 billion stadium. Inglewood Mayor James T. Butts Jr. called it "the best financial arrangement in the history of stadium deals in this country." After a 5-0 vote that let Kroenke bypass what could have been a lengthy environmental review at the site, football fans dressed in the team's blue and gold colors chanted "LA Rams! LA Rams!"

Right now, the biggest obstacle to making that happen isn't Oakland or San Diego but, of all places, St. Louis. Initially, Kroenke and the city had been \$575 million apart on the renovation plan for the Edward Jones Dome. Since then, St. Louis has come back with a new proposal for a state-of-the-art, open-air stadium in the city's blighted north riverfront section that includes \$400 million in public financing. The plan has a lot of potential pitfalls, the least of which is getting Kroenke to the table now that he has one foot in the California sand. But there is growing sentiment inside the league that after a year of gaffes by the NFL front office, the last thing it can afford to do is alienate more fans while leaving a pile of stadium money on the table. "Goodell won't let Stan move to LA," one NFL owner told ESPN. "Because Goodell would catch holy hell for moving a team from a market willing to spend hundreds of millions to keep a team."

It's not clear at this point what role, if any, NFL approval will play in Los Angeles. Dallas owner Jerry Jones has already said that Kroenke doesn't need the NFL's permission to move the Rams. It's an opinion backed by federal antitrust laws and argued in court by Al Davis, who moved his Raiders franchise to LA in 1982 and then back to Oakland 13 years later. Kroenke could follow that lead. It would be an ugly, drawn-out public spectacle, and the Rams would be a lame-duck franchise for years. But in the past, and with far less at stake, Kroenke has never shied away from a fight in court. For the time being, Kroenke's camp is saying he won't go against the NFL's wishes.

Just in case he changes his mind, Steelers president Art Rooney II, speaking in February for the NFL's new de facto Committee on Los Angeles Opportunities, reminded Kroenke that NFL bylaws still state that all franchise relocations require the approval of a super-





Kroenke's proposed Inglewood stadium would be part of a huge 300-acre development.

majority (24 of 32 owners). This is the much easier route, and the process of lobbying for those votes will begin in earnest on March 22. Among all their fellow owners, Kroenke, Chargers president Dean Spanos and Raiders owner Mark Davis will be working the room in Phoenix, gauging votes and gathering input and support for their own relocation plan while simultaneously working to sabotage their competitors. In other words, it's the kind of weekend retreat Frank Underwood would love.

At first glance, the Chargers would seem to have the upper hand. The Spanos family has owned the franchise for 30 years and has managed to build up a lot of influence (and sympathy) inside the league while trying for 14 years to get a new stadium built in San Diego.

What's more, schmoozing and glad-handing don't exactly seem to be Kroenke's forte.

He need not worry, though. In NFL circles, that extra comma in Kroenke's net worth, as well as his daring leap to secure LA and a global sports empire, speaks volumes. "He might be Silent Stan," says a former NFL executive. "But Kroenke's kind of power and profile makes the other owners swoon."

If Kroenke succeeds, it would be the perfect Hollywood ending for the quiet kid from Mora. He'd have marquee franchises in London and Los Angeles, a legacy far beyond Wal-Mart, billions in profits and, finally, recognition as the most powerful man in sports.

All without having to utter a single word.

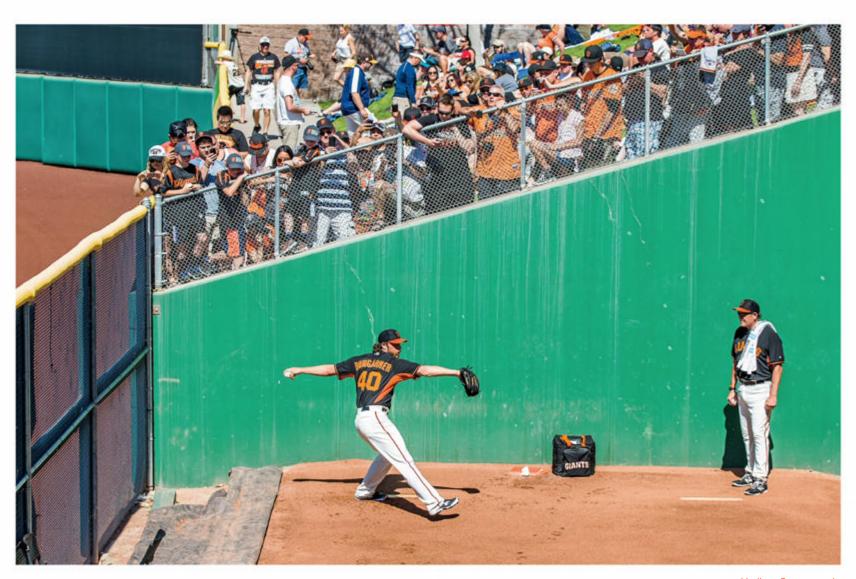
# WHO IS THE BEST HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL THE COUNTRY?



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Madison Bumgarner is back to build on his postseason heroics.



WELL, WE SURE didn't see *that* coming. Even after some 139 years, 207,000 games and 1,850,000 innings, it's amazing how major league baseball still manages to throw a few curveballs our way. (And we're not just talking the ones Madison Bumgarner uses to baffle hitters.) Who would have guessed the Marlins would hand out the richest contract ever ... to an outfielder whose season ended with a pitch to the face? (More power to you, Giancarlo Stanton!) Who would have known, if not for pitch-framing analytics, that catcher Jonathan Lucroy might be more valuable than Mike Trout? (Somebody tell the Brewers!) Have you heard that Toronto's top prospect, Daniel Norris, lives in a van? (And shaves with an ax!) And here's a shocker: As the Bud Selig era gives way to the Rob Manfred one, amid ceaseless hand-wringing over the game's future, MLB generated a record \$9 billion in revenue last year. Oh, you crazy game!

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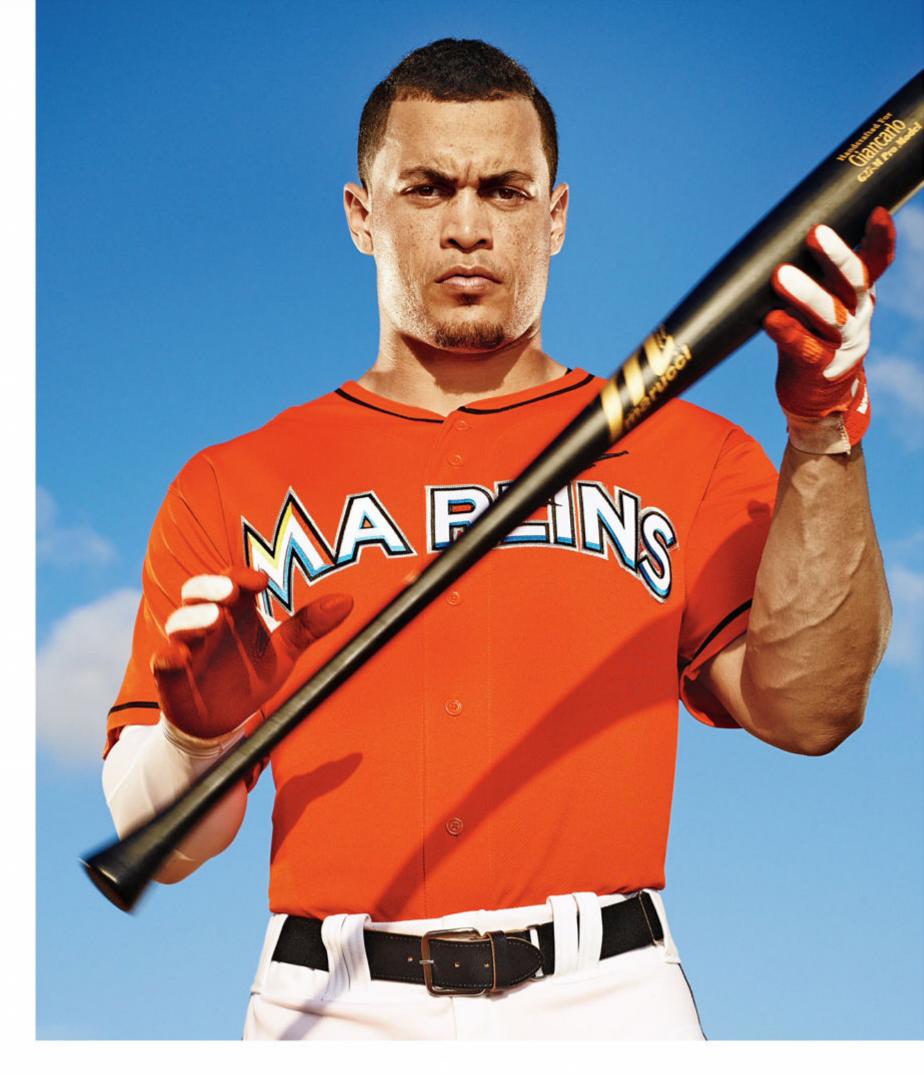
photograph by ROB TRINGALI 03/30/2015 ESPN The Magazine 47

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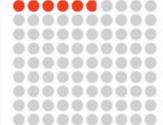
# **WHAT IS** IANCARL

BY TIM KEOWN

#### THAT'S DEEP, MAN

Since division play began in 1969, only three players have hit more homers than Stanton before their age-25 season.

PLAYER	HRs	SEASONS
ALEX RODRIGUEZ	189	1994-00
KEN GRIFFEY JR.	172	1989-94
ALBERT PUJOLS	160	2001-04
GIANCARLO STANTON	154	2010-14



0000000000

#### PLATE CLEANER

Of those three, only Pujols has homered at a higher rate (5.87% of plate appearances) than Stanton's 5.83%.



**THE MADE-FOR-TV** Hollywood Hills mansion, with its walls of windows, cantilevered decks and palm-flanked pool, Louis Armstrong and Frank Sinatra roll through the air. The views go on forever, and as the day wanes and the sun heads for its evening dip into the Pacific, Giancarlo Stanton moves his chair little by little to duck the stalking rays. It feels like the hippest scene from the '60s—martinis and Winstons for everyone!—rather than what it really is: three young ballplayers relaxing after a workout.

The youngest among them seems like the oldest. Stanton shared the house during the offseason with Marlins teammate A.J. Ramos (he of the retro music collection) and former teammate Ricky Nolasco. Stanton is the one who plans their annual three-week trip to Europe in October (a decidedly down month for the Marlins), he's the one who tries to persuade other players to travel with them, and he's the one who rolls his eyes when they ask, "Europe—what's there to do there?" He's the reason there's a man in Riga, Latvia, perhaps this very minute, telling friends he met The Rock in a restaurant. ("The guy asked in broken English," Ramos says, "and G raised his eyebrow just like The Rock and said, 'Yes, I am.'") He's the impetus for board-game nights and other "old-time things," as Ramos says, at which the object is to "not have everybody on their phones and stuff."

Stanton stands 6-foot-6 and weighs 240 pounds, but his presence is even larger than that. There is no other way to say it: The man is statuesque, maybe even pharaonic. Just hours before, on a warm morning in mid-January, he was running sprints barefoot on the beach next to the Santa Monica Pier,

wearing a 40-pound vest and gliding through six inches of sand as if he were on asphalt. Because it is LA, where it's not cool to concede that someone might be cooler than you, nobody seemed to care that the man pushing himself past the point of exhaustion is the owner of the richest contract in American sports history.

Stanton seems fine with that. He's not overly impressed either. He shops at Wal-Mart, partly for the people-watching but mostly because, as he asks, "Where else can you get all your supplies in one place?" He's loose now, and rightfully so. Coming off a season in which he led the National League in homers and slugging percentage, the 25-year-old is entering the prime of a career with Hall of Fame potential.

But back during the first week of November, this old soul in a young man's body found himself in a situation far more tense. There was no Sinatra or Wal-Mart greeter when he sat down with his agent and five of his bosses in the Beverly Hills Hotel to discuss a contract that would transform him into what team president David Samson calls "the first face of this franchise—the first player to be drafted, signed, play his entire career and go into the Hall of Fame as a Marlin."

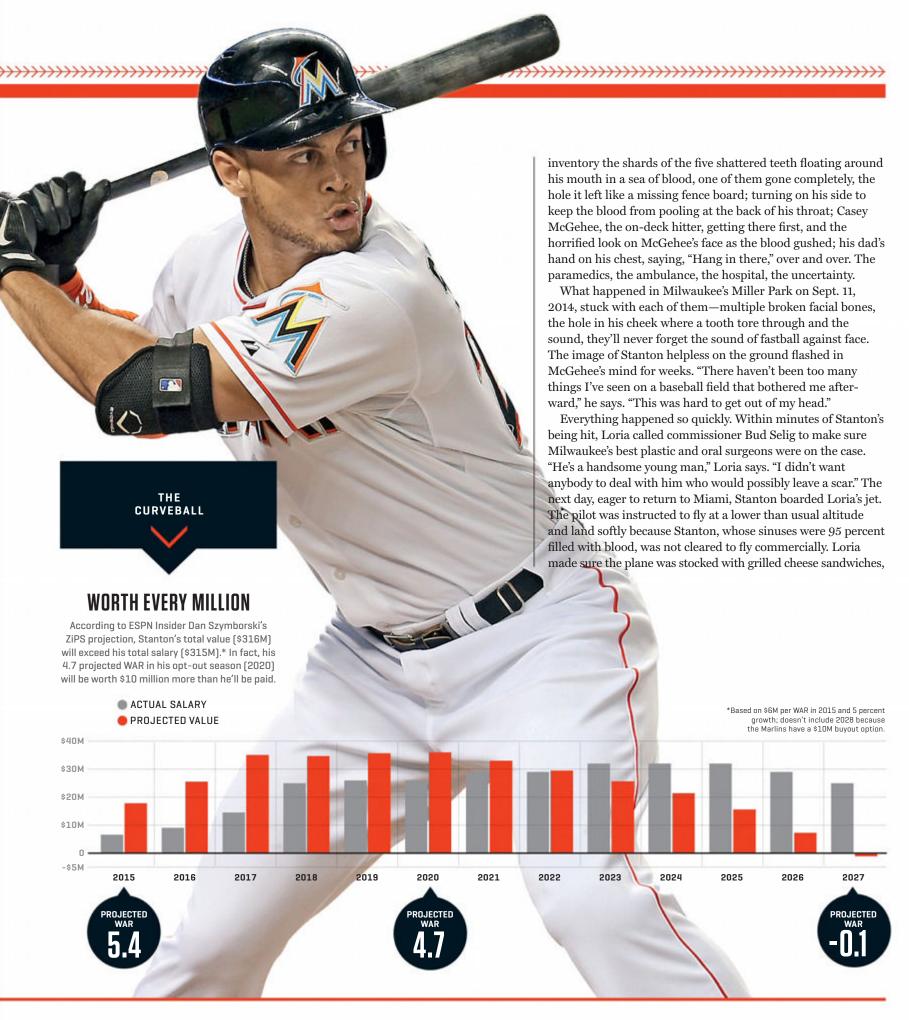
Heady stuff, but it says as much about the historic unsteadiness of the 22-year-old Marlins as it does about Stanton. Over the past 13 years, owner Jeffrey Loria's random and often cynical building and dismantling of Miami's baseball team have made the face of the franchise a Warholian kaleidoscope, an endless swirl of different men in the same cap. The hardboiled ownership style of the Manhattan-bred art dealer has earned Loria searing hatred in Montreal—where he bought a stake in the Expos for \$12 million, eventually selling it to MLB for \$120 million and buying the Marlins—and in Miami, where he made threats to relocate the team until he got a sweetheart deal on a stadium that could cost taxpayers \$2.4 billion.

Predictably, there was a hint of cynicism floating through the tony air at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Were the Marlins attempting to take advantage of their star player at his most vulnerable moment? Would Stanton want to be the face of a faceless franchise? And, most urgent, why trust Loria now?

So before the conversation began, and before anybody at the table knew the Marlins would grant Stanton's wish for what the two sides are now calling the Forever Deal—13 years, \$325 million—Stanton looked at the men assembled before him, at Loria and Samson and baseball operations boss Michael Hill and GM Dan Jennings and manager Mike Redmond, and he made an announcement: "I'm not going to sign just any contract because I got hit in the head."

**HE REMEMBERS THE** moment in pieces, fragments, in the time that elapsed between blackouts: Brewer Mike Fiers' arm action, the ball halfway there, its path obvious from the start, his body on the ground; feeling around with his tongue to







YOU KNOW EVAN
LONGORIA AS THE
POWER HITTING,
SMOOTH-FIELDING
THIRD BASEMAN OUT
OF TAMPA. BUT WHAT
HAPPENS IF YOU PUT
THE ALL-STAR BEHIND
THE ANCHOR DESK OR
IN THE RADIO BOOTH,
CALLING HIGHLIGHTS
INSTEAD OF MAKING
THEM?

With a little help from multimedia guru Scott Van Pelt and a crash course in the art of catchphrasing, Longoria's transition isn't exactly as smooth as his swing, but it's not bad.

All he's gotta do is move past the dated references (the weakest link? Seeing dead people? C'mon, holmes), find a catchphrase — make that an original catchphrase — and learn how to talk articulately and informatively for three hours, all while being funny. Thinking Longo will find that smooth glovework doesn't always translate to smooth talking.

There is one similarity between basebarrand sports talk: You've got to be in the zone — the comfort zone. The better you feel, the smoother you perform.

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one of Stanton's few guilty pleasures; the owner, unusually paternal when it comes to Stanton, says, "I was happy to hear he was able to eat them."

Six surgeries and four months later, part of Stanton's lip is still numb, and a slightly misaligned jaw causes his teeth to clench in his sleep. "I got lucky," he says, less than convincingly. "I got hit in the best part of the worst place."

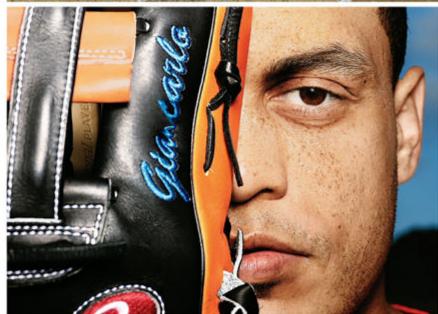
Mention the obvious—what happens *next?*—and Stanton is transported to games that have yet to be played. The questions and doubts, he says, "come with the territory." He's ready for them. The hours spent crafting a football-style half face mask, with the letter G part of the design, is a lighthearted diversion. But what happens when he gets back into the box? If the vision of Stanton's trauma stayed with McGehee for weeks, how long will it stay with the man who felt the pain, endured the surgeries and waits for the numbness to leave his lip? Pitchers, some undoubtedly fearing for their own safety, throw inside to keep Stanton from extending his arms. Now they have another reason: to test him.

"All the kinks will be handled in spring training, if there are any," Stanton says. "I can't answer 'til then."

He got it out of the way early. The baseball gods-or Henderson Alvarezmust have been in a playful mood during an intrasquad scrimmage, when Alvarez plunked Stanton on the left hip. The rest of Stanton's first week of spring training unfolded as uneventfully as he could have hoped. He approached each at-bat like every one before it, unwavering and businesslike, the same way he'd approached an offseason of uncertainty. "I did the exact same things I would do in any offseason," he says, "except I cut my face open."

When the Marlins' front office arrived en masse at the Beverly Hills Hotel to discuss Forever with Stanton and agent Joel Wolfe, Stanton approached the negotiations with the same level of defiance. He had seen too





# I GOT LUCKY. I GOT HIT IN THE BEST PART OF THE WORST PLACE."

much of the franchise's past to respond immediately with supplication and gratitude. He seethed through Loria's last binge-and-purge: the signings of free agents Jose Reyes and Mark Buehrle for the first year of Marlins Park in 2012, and then the massive trade that sent both to Toronto after the season. He grew more disgusted through a 100-loss 2013, when rebuilding looked like a ploy to gut payroll and reap the rewards of revenue sharing.

This was the unseen but dangerous undercurrent in the otherwise peaceful scene. After Stanton pronounced that he wasn't going to let the unknowable about his comeback cloud his judgment, Samson responded, "We're not going to give you just any contract because you got hit in the head." The

Marlins told him what they were willing to do and how long they were willing to do it, but Stanton still couldn't help wondering if he was to be Loria's next temporary showpiece, gaudy artwork to put on display while taking bids.

So before pen could hit paper, he had a few things of his own to discuss.

KNOW THIS: STANTON notices everything. He approaches life like a guy constantly trying to memorize a license plate. He notices the obvious, like the Marlins' penchant for treating the roster with a never-ending sleight of hand-now you see Miguel Cabrera, now you don'tand he notices the less obvious, like the way poor sleep and lousy nutrition have a debilitating impact on a team that travels the most miles in the NL East.

"He puts a lot of thought into everything-everything," Ramos says. "Before he acts, he always thinks a little bit. We're going to go eat and I'll ask, 'What do you want?'" Ramos pauses dramatically, stares into the distance. He's Stanton now. Five seconds, 10, 15 ... he's clearly a method guy. "Finally, I'm like: 'Dude, I'm hungry. Let's go.'"

Stanton is as exacting as he is deliberate. He was a three-sport starbaseball ranking third—at Notre Dame High in Sherman Oaks, California, and was recruited to play wide receiver at USC before the Marlins took him in the second round of the 2007 draft. His plan was to give pro ball three years before reassessing whether he might try college football. By then, though, he was already in the bigs.

After an All-Star third season in 2012, Stanton noticed the creep of entitlement spreading like algae and moving his way in the clubhouse, and he told Redmond he wanted it to stop. Special treatment in baseball is quirky: It's accepted that a star gets three locker stalls in a corner rather than one in the middle between a reliever and a guy who has memorized the flight schedule between Miami and New Orleans. But a star who expects a

different kind of special treatment—especially one who doesn't take well to criticism—gets his share of side-eye.

"I don't care how good or bad you are, you're going to make a mistake," Stanton says, "so make sure I'm the same as that rookie over there."

It didn't feel right, probably because he'd never experienced it. Raised by postal workers who divorced when he was 10, Stanton chose to transfer from Verdugo Hills High to Notre Dame after his sophomore year for a more disciplined atmosphere and better sports teams. As an under-the-radar baseball player on the fertile fields of Southern California, he always played as if someone important might be watching.

Part of scouting is espionage, so Marlins scout Tim McDonnell sat in his car in the parking lot beyond left field at games, watching through binoculars, careful not to give himself away. He surveyed the stands, looking for other scouts, because another part of scouting is determining the opposition. Either he or his assistant attended every game of Stanton's senior year, and they wrote down the name of every scout they saw. The list was short. McDonnell would put his binoculars on his lap and ask himself, "Am I crazy?"

Stanton's relative anonymity was a result of a system that favors exposure over potential. He was not a product of youth baseball's industry. He did not play on expensive travel teams or attend the \$500-a-day showcases where 15-year-olds ("showcase ponies," McDonnell calls them) run through drills

Stanton's 154 homers through his age-24 season is 56 more than that of any active player under 25. Mike Trout, though, has 98 through his age-22 season, five more than Stanton did at the same point in his career.

with cookie-cutter mechanics and false hustle and emerge like factory parts.

He was a no-name among local youth baseball royalty. Matt Dominguez, Mike Moustakas, Josh Vitters-they'd all been on the circuit for years, known to scouts before their pits sprouted hair. Stanton was Mike then, mostly because he got tired of everyone mispronouncing Giancarlo and said: "Y'all are annoying. See if you can handle Mike." He's still Mike to those from his past, and he's Cruz—his full name is Giancarlo Cruz Michael Stanton-to his mother's side of the family. But during batting practice at his one high-level (but free) showcase event after his junior year, he was the "big fella" with the long swing who drove five balls over the fence while nobody else hit more than one.

After the '07 draft, and Stanton's signing for \$475,000, McDonnell was in the stands at a summer tournament when an older scout approached him and put a hand on his shoulder. "Man, you really reached for that one," he said, chuckling, "but you'll learn."

To answer the next question: No, McDonnell has never thrown those patronizing words back in the scout's face. "I knew I was right," he says. "For some guys, it's all about themselves. But for him, it wasn't the Mike Stanton Show-it still isn't."

So Stanton, that ethic still in place, vowed that this outsized Forever Deal, if it came to pass, would be the tide that lifts all boats. His frustration went deeper than the standings. When the Marlins exceeded expectations last season, contending for a wild-card spot and reaching .500 in late August, Stanton provided the poetry, telling Yahoo Sports, "Five months doesn't change five years." He hated the losing, sure, but he despised the culture that enabled it.

"I made it clear that I wasn't happy with our lack of success for the whole time I've been here," Stanton says. "There's only so long you can cry wolf. You've got to start making a push.



There's no more beating around the bush. The time is now."

Stanton's message to the assembled brass at the Beverly Hills Hotel: For the Marlins to become a sustainable, competitive franchise over the course of this proposed contract, management needs to make fundamental changes beyond the makeup of the roster.

"You can't just bring anyone in," he says. "It doesn't matter how good they are. When it gets tough and you're heading down the stretch, you need players you want to play for. It's not, 'This guy comes out and throws every five days and then plays video games.' You're not going to die for that guy."

This is the attitude Stanton brought to the negotiating table, the same resolve he brings to the plate. The most powerful hitter in the game was about to become its most powerful player.

**HE HITS THE** ball as if he has a personal grudge, as if it owes him, over and over, for unforgivable slights. He led the NL with 37 homers last year despite missing the final three weeks, and he was that Fiers fastball away from winning the NL MVP. "He should have won it anyway," says Marlins catcher Jarrod Saltalamacchia.

Stanton rarely shows emotion, and it has become a contest for teammates to detect it when he does. Every once in a while, they claim, when he hits one that lands in a faraway place—like a camera well, high above the wall in dead center—he'll betray the thick bark of his professionalism with a slight smile.

"Sometimes there was a little look on his face," says McGehee, now a Giant. "You could see he was proud of himself."

Power hitters are the rarest commodity, the astatine of the baseball world. Just seven players hit at least 35 home runs last year, and just nine players in history have hit more homers through their age-24 season than Stanton's 154. It's possible that all of them, placed

end to end, haven't traveled as far as Stanton's.

"When you get one, you don't even feel like you swung hard," he says. "Just an air swing. It's very addicting, so you have to be disciplined. When you hit one that far, you think: I don't think I swung that hard. I might be able to get a little bit more. That's when you get bad habits."

There it is again, the constant nag, the part of him that sees the dark side of a 500-foot shot. It's why he didn't instantly jump at the deal. In fact, he walked away. Let me think about it, he said, leaving slack jaws in his wake. "In all honesty," Redmond says, "you wouldn't think twice if the guy who's offered a few hundred million dollars just says, 'OK, I'll take it."

Stanton needed more than gaudy figures. He needed a no-trade clause, the first issued under Loria, and an opt-out after six years. Satisfying those needs, however, came at a cost. To provide the team with payroll flexibility, he agreed to a massively backloaded deal; Stanton will make the same amount this year as last, and if he opts out, he'll leave \$218 million on the table. He is giving the benefit of the doubt to a franchise and an owner that have yet to prove they deserve it. "It's a shield, not a sword," Samson says of the opt-out. "He wanted it to protect himself in case we don't hold up our end of the deal. All of our legacies are on the line. If either one of us is wrong, it's a career-defining move."

Stanton also needed the culture to change. The Marlins were flying in charters that didn't even have Wi-Fi; he and teammates who wanted high-protein, low-fat meals were forced to bring them from home.

This year the Marlins will be on a new first-class-only charter with massage tables and, yes, Wi-Fi. They will have a chef in the home clubhouse, relieving Stanton of frequent trips to Whole Foods to buy fresh fish for his pregame meals. As for the payroll flexibility, Stanton will be part of MLB's best young outfield, along with Gold Glove left fielder Christian Yelich and 23-homer center fielder Marcell Ozuna. And they will be joined by new acquisitions: Dee Gordon at second, Martin Prado at third, Michael Morse at first and Mat Latos in the rotation. None of them is likely to change the face of the NL East-Gordon's on-base percentage is subpar, Morse has topped 100 games just three times in 10 seasons—but Stanton saw the moves as a sign, at least, of management's commitment. "It all started with him," says Hill, the president of baseball ops. "If Giancarlo's not a part of the Marlins, we go a different direction."

It's a startling admission, proof that Stanton's power within the organization makes one of his 500-foot homers look like a

pop to short. Still, why the trust? Why does Stanton believe this time will be different? Wasn't Cabrera supposed to be the face of the franchise too? Buehrle and Reves both contend that Loria told them to purchase homes in South Florida before he traded them, charges Loria denies. Then again, that 2012 team was aimless, and the 15-game improvement from '13 to '14 significant.

Is there hope among fans waiting nearly an hour for Saltalamacchia's autograph at the Winter Warm-Up at Marlins Park in February? Does a 100-yard line to the Selfie Station—a team employee mans the camera, but whatever—for Alvarez indicate a rebirth of baseball in Miami?

"I know I took a lot of criticism," says Loria, "but you don't get to the top by wading in the water."

Some of the harshest words came from within, however, from the young man Loria refers to with fatherly, or maybe grandfatherly, tenderness. He encouraged Stanton to travel when he made the big leagues, and he and his wife dined with Stanton and Nolasco two years ago at the Eiffel Tower. But the friendly fire that came from that deliberate young man in the Beverly Hills Hotel—"pointed questions," Redmond calls them-changed the molecules in the air. Loria wasn't the only ruthless businessman in the room.

The future has never seemed to mean much to Loria. It means everything to the guy who sat across the table, the guy who requested and received the Forever Deal. For nearly a week after exiting the hotel, Stanton assessed the contract from every angle, a jeweler gauging a stone. With the opt-out and all promises in place, pen finally hit paper, and the clock started. Six years to forever.







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# THERE'S NO OTHER WAY TO FRAME IT: THE BREWERS CATCHER IS THE MOST UNDERVALUED STAR IN THE GAME.

BY ROBERT SANCHEZ

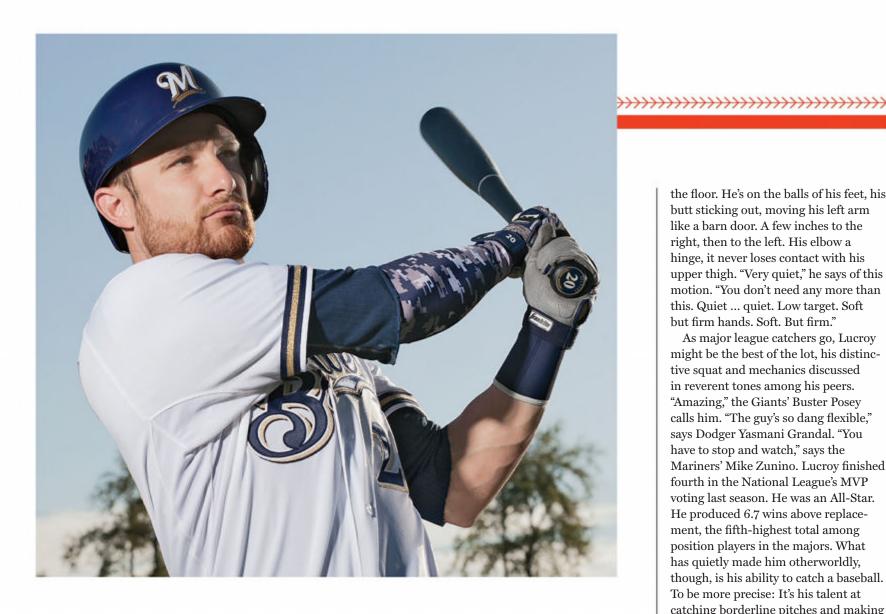
### WHAT A CATCH

From 2012 to 2014, Lucroy's WAR topped most catchers'. His salary? Not so much.

PLAYER	WAR	EARNINGS
BUSTER POSEY	18.0	\$21.1M
YADIER MOLINA	15.4	\$36M
JONATHAN LUCROY	13.8	\$3.2M
RUSSELL MARTIN	11.6	\$22.5M







MORNING A FEW weeks before spring training, baseball's most underpaid player tosses his daughter's crayon drawing onto the floor, pulls on his mitt and drops into an impossibly low crouch. "That's home plate," Jonathan Lucroy says, pointing to his 4-year-old's picture of a rainbow on the carpet just off his kitchen in Lafayette, Louisiana. The Brewers catcher hunches

his frame until his back looks like a snail's shell, until this

6-foot man becomes a 3-foot ball. "This is how low I get," the

28-year-old says. "Have you ever seen a catcher this low?" He

flashes his glove—a patch of brown leather maybe a foot off

the floor. He's on the balls of his feet, his butt sticking out, moving his left arm like a barn door. A few inches to the right, then to the left. His elbow a hinge, it never loses contact with his upper thigh. "Very quiet," he says of this motion. "You don't need any more than this. Quiet ... quiet. Low target. Soft but firm hands. Soft. But firm."

As major league catchers go, Lucroy might be the best of the lot, his distinctive squat and mechanics discussed in reverent tones among his peers. "Amazing," the Giants' Buster Posey calls him. "The guy's so dang flexible," says Dodger Yasmani Grandal. "You have to stop and watch," says the Mariners' Mike Zunino. Lucroy finished fourth in the National League's MVP voting last season. He was an All-Star. He produced 6.7 wins above replacement, the fifth-highest total among position players in the majors. What has quietly made him otherworldly, though, is his ability to catch a baseball. To be more precise: It's his talent at catching borderline pitches and making umpires think they've seen a strike.

The next day, he's back in that crouch, this time at the University of Louisiana Lafayette's indoor football facility a few miles from his home. "Let's go," he hollers as I set up to throw him some pitches. From 60 feet, 6 inches away, Lucroy looks anemic, like a sick bird, his body doubled over and pulled tight, a Frisbee mounted on two feet. He sets up and shows his glove. His body is whisper-quiet, his head motionless. He catches the first pitch, and it sticks like a dart. Another. Then another. His mitt doesn't receive the ball as much as it has its own gravitational pull. Pop. Pop. Pop. The throws are a few inches off here, a foot off there. But they all look perfect. "Keep 'em coming," Lucroy says. But the next one—oh, that next one's a mess. It's low, too low, and it smacks into the turf. sending a spray of black rubber pellets into Lucroy's chest.



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But there's that glove. Pop. And there's the ball. Lucroy doesn't move. Blink and you'd have wondered ... strike?

Only recently have online stats gurus and baseball front offices begun to quantify this stealth skill—called pitch framing—and figure out its effect on outcomes. The results will certainly change the way the league evaluates its most demanding position. And it might also change how we view a player like Lucroy, the poster child for the stolen strike and the prototype from which future strike stealers could be built.

According to Baseball Prospectus, Lucroy produced 121 stolen strikes last season and in the past five seasons clocks in at more than 1,000, the most in MLB. And if you believe the metrics, these stolen strikes have been worth about 18 wins during his five-year career—just shy of what Giancarlo Stanton's entire output has added up to during the same time. Still, Lucroy's discreetly prodigious output has been underestimated. By fans. By the media. By his own team. And certainly by the game's salary structure. Even in today's post-Moneyball world, pitch framing is viewed through a skeptical lens; a value-added talent, sure, but one for which teams are reluctant to pay. While Stanton cashed in with a 13-year. \$325 million contract this offseason

and Mike Trout begins the first year of his \$144.5 million deal, Lucroy was actually more valuable last year. For that he earned \$2 million; this year, he'll make \$3 million.

Put another way: The most impactful player in baseball today is the game's 17th highest-paid catcher.

THERE ARE SIGNS, at least, that pitch framing is having its moment. The Rays figured it out first in 2012, signing Jose Molina, a light-hitting catcher in his mid-30s who was among the best at getting borderline calls. During three seasons with the Rays, Molina's framing alone was worth about 7.5 WAR. (Current WAR statistics don't account for it.) To the dismay of pitch-framing advocates, Tampa Bay released Molina in the offseason, but in came Rene Rivera, a 31-year-old who recorded 177 extra strikes last season with the Padres—behind only Buster Posey's 180.

The Rays aren't alone. The Astros and Dodgers also made framing-focused trades in the offseason, acquiring Hank Conger and Grandal, respectively. Then there are the Cubs, who finished 2014 with perhaps the game's worst collection of pitch framers. (Former starter Welington Castillo recorded *minus*-62 calls, turning strikes into balls.) Team president Theo Epstein and general manager Jed Hoyer spent the offseason on a massive overhaul of their team, one that included trading for Miguel Montero—who recorded 96 extra strikes last season with the Diamondbacks—and signing journeyman David Ross to a two-year, \$5 million deal. The net difference is 212 called strikes. That's equivalent to about 3.5 WAR, an enormous swing for a team that wants to contend for a playoff spot.

Ross, 38, is on his seventh team in 13 years and owns a career .233 batting average. But last season with the Red Sox, he got the benefit of the doubt on 46 borderline calls in 50 games; in 2013, he earned 53 calls in 36 games. "I know there's value in what I do," Ross says. "I mean, I hit

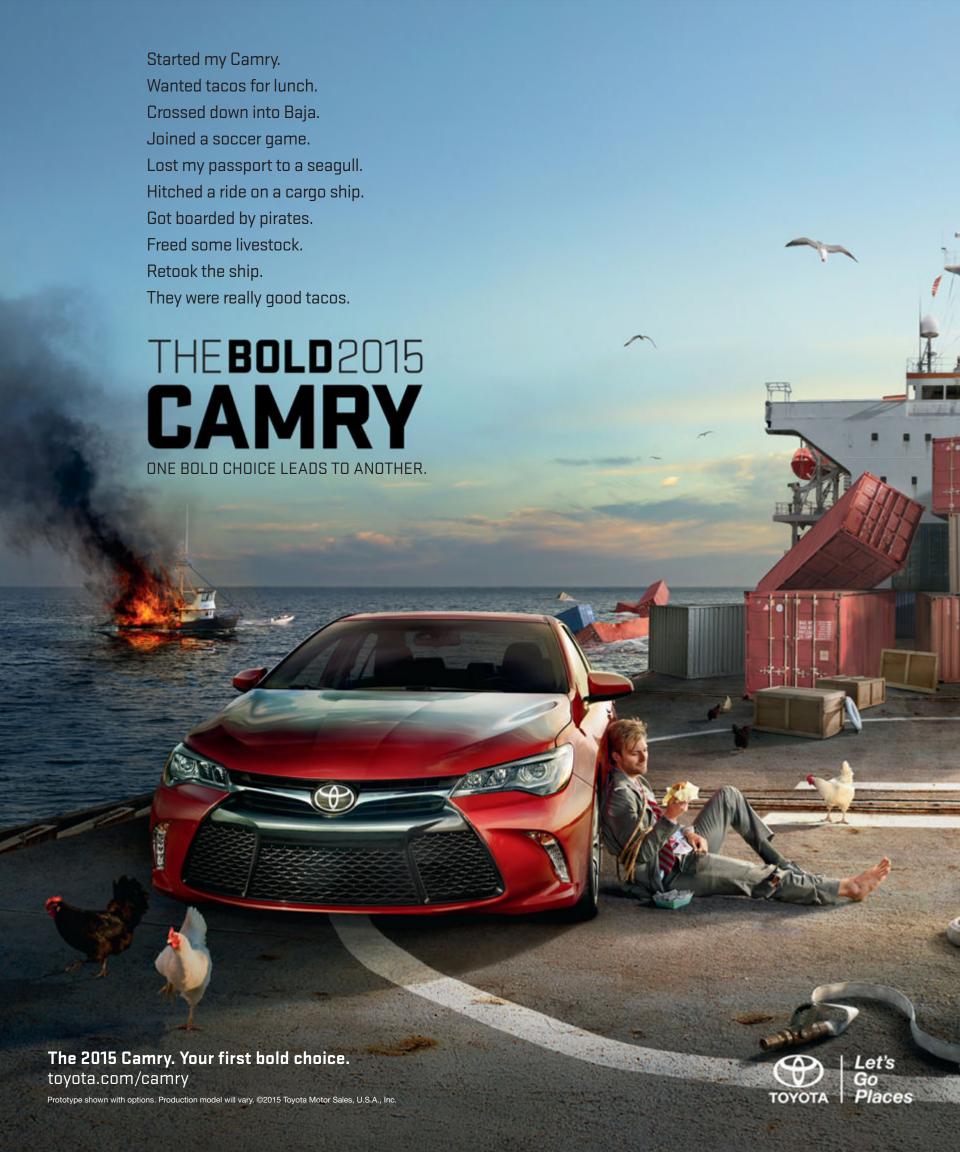
a buck eighty-four last year and I just got a two-year deal."

Standing atop a bullpen mound at the Cubs' spring training facility in Mesa, Arizona, Joe Maddon is watching the new lineup come to life. A coach is feeding baseballs into a pitching machine. The balls sweep and curve and smash into Montero's glove. "Yeaw!" one coach shouts when the catcher sticks a tough ball, making it look like an edge-grabbing strike. After 15 or so machine-spit pitches, the Cubs' new manager stops the session and walks toward his starting catcher, a broad grin spread across his face. "Dang!" Maddon marvels. "I knew you were good, but not that good!"

At the other end of the bullpen, Ross is snapping up low pitches. Four other catchers—including Castillo, who could soon drop off the roster—are receiving pitches too. Epstein, standing nearby, takes it all in. Maddon, meanwhile, moves behind Montero, crouches over his shoulder like an umpire and watches as more baseballs are fired just outside the strike zone. "Gaw-dang!" he says, his voice crackling through the morning. "That's nice!"

Although Epstein has gone all-in on catching, he admits it took awhile to figure out how to value framing and his team's internal data. "We didn't want to

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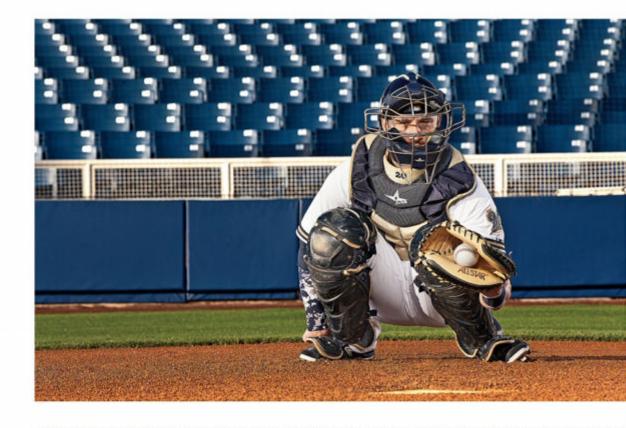


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rush to make decisions until we were sure we had the kinks worked out," Epstein says when his catchers move to batting practice. "We haven't been on the cutting edge, and with new data streams coming in all the time, there's a sense that [framing] is still evolving. Baseball is hard to figure out. We don't pretend to have all the answers on this."

Epstein is not just being humble. Even in what might be considered the dawn of pitch framing's golden age, there's caution at the executive level. Of the top 10 framers last season, only two-Posey and Montero-made \$10 million or more, and those two were paid mostly for their offensive output. Three of the top five framing catchers made less than \$550,000; seven of the top 10 earned \$2 million or less. There are several reasons for the lagging market. Some worry the new statistics might, in fact, overemphasize framing's role in the game and inflate a catcher's value. Take the Astros' Conger, who played just 80 games for the Angels last season, hit four home runs and got on base less than 30 percent of the time. If you believe the stats, his framing alone was worth about 2.8 WAR, which—when added to his conventional 0.7 WAR-made Conger more valuable than 154 games of

Justin Upton. Can that be right? Another concern: Might umpires, now armed with names of the game's best framers, start squeezing their strike zones? And how can teams be sure their data is accurate—that there won't be a development tomorrow that turns framing on its head?

Then there's the thought that any softhanded minor league catcher with the right coaching could jump to the top of the strike-stealing leaderboard. So why pay a premium for what you can develop on the cheap? "Maybe you could reverse-engineer your team," Epstein says.

Lucroy's knack for pitch framing, for example, is largely a learned talent. When he reported to his first minor league team, after the Brewers took him in the third round of the 2007 draft, "he moved a lot behind the plate," says Charlie Greene, the Brewers' longtime catching instructor. "His glove was flopping all over the place; he'd go down on one knee, then he'd go high. Not real pretty." Although Lucroy was raw, Greene saw potential. He had unusually soft and strong hands and the ability to drop low behind the plate. He could get under an incoming pitch, which opened up the umpire's field of vision and made the plate seem even bigger.

# "I'M NOT **TRYING TO** TRICK AN UMPIRE. C'M NOT A MAGICIAN."

During those early workouts, Greene had a pitching machine fire 100 mph fastballs at Lucroy from 55 feet away. The machine smashed hammer curves, zipped 94 mph sliders. "I wanted to give him stuff he'd never see in the big leagues," Greene says now. "He got 1,000 balls a week. We were emptying buckets." When Lucroy was brought to the majors in 2010, he hit just .253 with four home runs in 75 games. But he quickly made a name for himself as one of the game's top framers—a reputation that he has only bolstered since, even as he's developed into one of the best-hitting catchers.

"I've had several umpires tell me, 'You make it look so good,'" he says. "And, you know, I'm not trying to trick an umpire. I'm not a magician. What I do is not smoke and mirrors. My job is to make the pitcher look as good as possible."

BACK AT THE house in Louisiana, Lucroy is sitting on a couch across from his agent, Doug Rogalski, when the subject of his contract is brought up. It's become a rough topic since he signed it late in the spring of 2012. Lucroy hit .320 and posted an .881 OPS in an injury-shortened season that year. He hit .280 with 18 homers the next season—and made \$750,000—then exploded in 2014 with a .301 average, a .373 on-base percentage and a league-leading 53 doubles—the most ever for his position. Lucroy's deal guarantees him \$7 million over the next two seasons and gives the Brewers an option to buy a year of free agency. Lucroy will make another \$5.25 million if his option is picked up in 2017—a deep discount no matter who's doing the math. In fact, if you have confidence in the additional 2 WAR that framing would have given Lucroy, his 2014 season would have been worth about \$56 million on the free agent market this offseason.

# **GET READY FOR BASEBALL!**

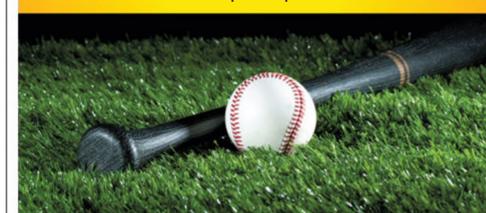
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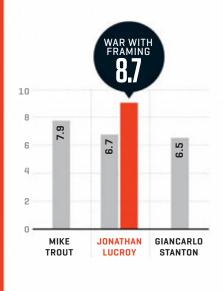


### THE REAL MVP

Add Lucroy's framing metrics into his already strong WAR from last season and his output soars above some of the game's biggest names.

WAR

WAR WITH FRAMING



(Baseball Prospectus' estimates are based on \$7 million per WAR.)

So did Lucroy underestimate himself too? He shakes his head. Consider the timing: He was a career .260 hitter when the Brewers approached him about the extension, and framing was in its infancy. "If I would have known, from an industry perspective, that framing would have become as important as it's become, maybe things would have been different," says Rogalski, his agent.

"It's all hindsight," Lucroy adds. "When I signed the extension, I'd been in the league for a year and a half, and I had a wife and a newborn. It was a calculated risk, and I took the security. I had Ryan Braun, Corey Hart, Rickie Weeks, all these veteran dudes on my team saying the first time you get money in the big leagues you have to take it. I'm sitting there saying, 'Heck yeah, dude. Let's go."

If his option is picked up, Lucroy will be 31 when he hits the free agent market—an age when players are considered on the downswing of their careers. Still, Russell Martin's new contract might be the clearest indication that Lucroy is on target for a huge payday. Martin, 32, got five years and \$82 million from the Blue Jays after a 5.5 WAR season and 111 extra strikes for the Pirates in 2014. Another comparison is Yadier Molina, a smooth hitter who's often considered the benchmark for defensive catchers. He'll make \$43 million between this season and 2017, when the Cardinals have the option to pick up another year of the then-35-year-old's contract.

What's less clear is whether Milwaukee recognizes Lucroy's full value. GM Doug Melvin said earlier this year the team wanted to put Lucroy at first base more often, a plan that would keep his bat in the lineup and save his body from the constant behind-the-plate beating. The idea gained steam early in spring

training when Lucroy was sidelined with a right hamstring strain. But even with the injury, Lucroy—who played 19 games at first last season—thinks it misguided to shift him to a different position. "If I'm at catcher, with my offense and defense, people would probably put me up here," he says, raising his right hand above his shoulders. He drops the left hand near his waist, like a scale. "If I'm at first, I'm not going to be as valuable to this team." Later, he adds: "Look at my WAR, then factor in my blocking and the way I catch the ball. Does that translate equally to first base? I don't think it does."

CASE IN POINT, July 18, 2014. Milwaukee is playing the Nationals in the first game back from the All-Star break. Stephen Strasburg's power vs. Kyle Lohse's control. Exactly what Lucroy wants.

From the opening pitch, it's typical Lucroy. He's lower than low back there, setting up on the outside corner on righties, begging Lohse to paint the corner. In the second inning, against Ryan Zimmerman, Lucroy grabs a first-pitch outside changeup and turns it into strike 1. Two batters later, this time against Ian Desmond, Lohse drops a 2-0 sinker well off the corner. Lucroy holds the ball in front of him for an extra second. Up in the Nationals' television booth, the play-by-play man reacts. "He misses. ... Oh, he catches the outside corner." 2-1.

Lucroy turns another outside sinker in the third into strike 3 against Strasburg. Strasburg freezes, his bat's barrel pointing skyward. He shakes his head and mutters to himself as he walks back to the dugout. Jayson Werth is the next victim. He gets an 0-1 sinker just off the plate. "Two!" the plate umpire shouts. So it goes: Strasburg, again, in the fourth inning, with a low-and-outside pitch. Strike. Strasburg winces. This time, it's the Nats' color guy: "He's thinking, 'I want that one when I'm

pitching." Then there's Anthony Rendon in the fifth, with a first-pitch sinker off the plate. Strike 1. Rendon snaps his head back. Lucroy has Washington's hottest hitter out of the at-bat almost before it begins. As strike 3 whizzes past five pitches later, all Rendon can do is smirk.

In the ninth inning, with the Brewers up 4-2, closer Francisco Rodriguez whips a first-pitch sinker to Wilson Ramos. It's low and away. Strike 1. Ramos looks back toward the umpire. He eventually hits a harmless bouncer to third base for the second out. One batter later, it's game over. Lucroy and Rodriguez slap hands midway between home and the mound. Seven balls turned into strikes. Lucroy being Lucroy. Baseball's best player just doing his thing.

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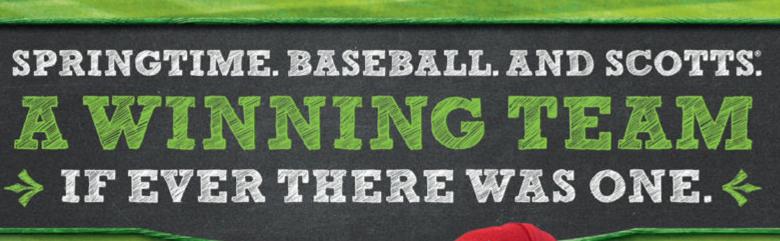


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# IT'S THE NATIONALS' TIME

#### (MEMO TO THE REST: THEY'RE HERE TO STAY)



### OUR FORECAST REVEALS WHO'S BUILT TO CONTEND NOW, WHO'S PLAYING FOR THE FUTURE AND THE ONE TEAM THAT'S BEST SET UP TO DO BOTH: WASHINGTON.

#### 2015 PROJECTED ORDER OF FINISH

AL EAST
1 RED SOX
2 ORIOLES
3 BLUE JAYS
4 YANKEES
5 RAYS

AL CENTRAL		
1 TIGERS		
O INIDIANIO		

2 INDIANS 3 ROYALS 4 WHITE SOX

5 TWINS

3 ANGELS 4 RANGERS 5 ASTROS

AL WEST

1 MARINERS

#### **NL EAST** 1 NATIONALS

2 MARLINS 3 METS 4 BRAVES

5 PHILLIES

#### **NL CENTRAL** 1 CARDINALS 2 PIRATES 3 CUBS

4 BREWERS 5 REDS

#### **NL WEST** 1 DODGERS

2 PADRES **3** GIANTS 4 ROCKIES

#### 5 D-BACKS

#### GLOSSARY

Contribution age A team's average age, weighted by 2015 projected wins above replacement (WAR). The more a team is fueled by younger players, the lower its contribution age will be.

Value judgments To illuminate contribution age, we ID the young'un (25 or under) and vet (30 or older) on each team projected to have the highest WAR.



#### **BOSTON RED SOX**

85-77

28.02

Projected record

#### MONEY TALKS

After a dreadfully disappointing 71-win campaign in 2014, the Red Sox are buying their way out of the cellar, trotting out the most expensive club in team history this season (\$182M). The acquisitions of 3B Pablo Sandoval [career .811 OPS] and LF Hanley Ramirez [.873] add firepower to an anemic offense that scored 1.36 fewer runs per game than in 2013. Question is: Can they get back to the playoffs without an ace? Rick Porcello, Wade Miley and Justin Masterson join 30-year-old Clay Buchholz as the team loads up on ground ballers (52 percent ground ball rate last season) in an age of strikeout pitchers.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS\*\*

TOP YOUNG'UN CF Mookie Betts Age 22

TOP VET 2B Dustin Pedroia Age 31



\*Average age, weighted by projected WAR. \*\*Young player (25 or under) and vet (30 or older) with team's highest projected WAR.

Analysis by ESPN.com senior writer David Schoenfield. Projections from ESPN Insider Dan Szymborski.





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#### BALTIMORE WILD CARD ORIOLES

85-77

Projected record

Contribution age

#### **REGRESSIONS ARE MEAN**

Here's a fun fact: The AL East champion Orioles didn't employ a true ace last season, yet they allowed 116 fewer runs than in 2013, and the rotation had a 3.19 ERA from June 1 onward, second lowest in the AL. Moreover, Baltimore won 96 games, its best season since 1997. Impressive? Definitely. Repeatable? Not so much. The rotation ranked 23rd in the majors in strikeout rate [18.2 percent], 25th in walk rate (7.8 percent) and 25th in home runs allowed per nine innings (1.03). Though Chris Tillman is a 200-inning workhorse and Kevin Gausman (3.57 ERA in '14) is primed for a breakout year, there's a reason those computers project an 11-game slide: regression to the mean.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN TOP VFT 3B Manny Machado SS J.J. Hardy Age 22 Age 32

2015 PROJECTED WAR 3.7 WORST CASE | BASELINE BEST CASE



#### **TORONTO** BLUE JAYS

82-80

Projected record

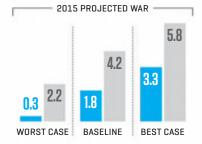
Contribution age

#### POWER PLAYS

With the AL's oldest contribution age, the Blue Jays are built to win in 2015. New catcher Russell Martin, 32 and coming off a career-high .402 OBP in 2014, will hit in front of the league's most powerful trio-RF Jose Bautista, 1B Edwin Encarnacion and new 3B Josh Donaldson—which combined for 98 home runs last season and project to jack another 85 in 2015. Fifteen-year vet Mark Buehrle and 40-year-old R.A. Dickey top a below-average rotation that ranked 21st in WHIP and K's per nine innings last season. So even with the team's elite offensive production, the mediocrity on the mound will result in Toronto's 22nd straight season without a playoff appearance.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN TOP VFT SP Drew Hutchison RF Jose Bautista Age 34 Age 24





#### **NEW YORK** VANKEES

81-81

Projected record

Contribution age

#### THE BRONX ABOMINATIONS

Eight of the Yankees' nine projected position players will be older than 30 this season-that doesn't even factor in 39-year-old Alex Rodriguez, who will likely be a platoon DH, if he plays at all. And these graybeards will be backing up injury-prone pitchers Masahiro Tanaka, CC Sabathia and Michael Pineda, who combined for just 41 starts last season. The good news, if there is any: The defense will be better with Didi Gregorius replacing Derek Jeter at short, and Dellin Betances and Andrew Miller might be MLB's most dominant bullpen duo. Still, the defense and late-inning relief won't get the Yanks to the playoffs; at best they'll hold off their first losing season since 1992.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN SS Didi Gregorius Age 25

TOP VET 3B Chase Headley Age 30





## TAMPA BAY

81-81

Projected record

Contribution age

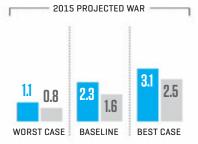
#### **RAYS OF FAINT HOPE**

Want a sleeper pick? Look no further. Using a stat called BaseRuns—simply bases gained minus bases allowedthe 77-85 Rays should have gone 83-79 in 2014, suggesting a true talent level better than their record. That potential is most apparent in the starting rotation. Alex Cobb (2.82 ERA over the past two seasons) could be the best starter in the AL East, while Drew Smyly, 25, had a 1.70 ERA in seven starts after joining the team from Detroit. On the flip side, ZiPS sees widespread ineptitude on offense. Although 3B Evan Longoria projects to rebound this season (.255/.330/.441), no player on the current roster is expected to hit above .275 or surpass a .350 OBP.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN RF Kevin Kiermaier Age 24

TOP VET DH John Jaso Age 31



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MEEP CLIMBING

▲ DELTA

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# **DETROIT TIGERS**

86-76

29.47

Projected record

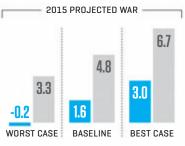
#### **CLASSIC CORE VETS**

With a contribution age just shy of 30, it's win or bust in Detroit. An increasingly brittle Justin Verlander must improve upon his lowest strikeout rate [6.9] since 2006, and fellow starters Alfredo Simon and Shane Greene must cover for the losses of Max Scherzer and Rick Porcello. Fortunately, the Tigers can score their way to an AL title on the bats of DH Victor Martinez and 1B Miguel Cabrera: The duo, which anchored a lineup that finished second in runs scored last season, project to hit 49 HRs. The issue? Martinez is 36; Miggy is 31.

#### **VALUE JUDGMENTS\*\***

TOP YOUNG'UN 3B Nick Castellanos Age 23

TOP VET 1B Miguel Cabrera Age 31

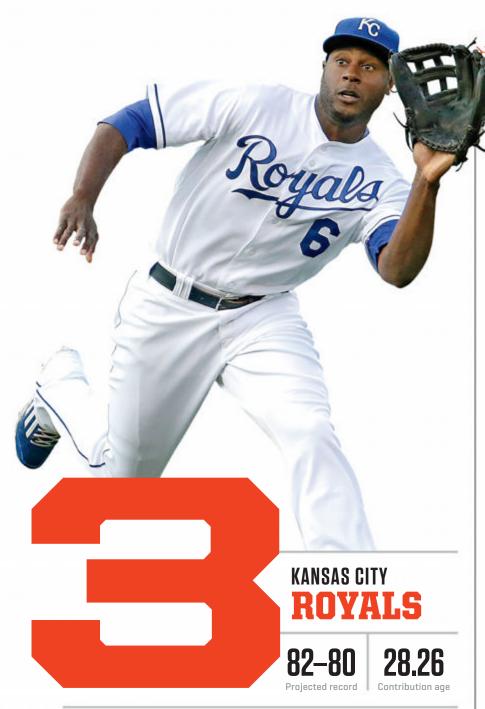


\*Average age, weighted by projected WAR. \*\*Young player (25 or under) and vet (30 or older) with team's highest projected WAR.

Analysis by ESPN.com senior writer David Schoenfield. Projections from ESPN Insider Dan Szymborski.





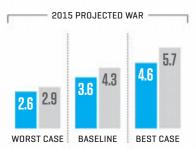


#### REIGN DELAY VALUE JU

The trio of Greg Holland, Wade Davis and Kelvin Herrera (1.28 ERA over 204 IP) should dominate in relief of promising starters Yordano Ventura and Danny Duffy. And the outfield (46 defensive runs saved in 2014), led by CF Lorenzo Cain, will track down everything. But no team had a more depressing offseason than KC, which replaced James Shields, Billy Butler and Nori Aoki with 34-year-old OF Alex Rios (.709 OPS in 2014) and DH Kendrys Morales (minus-1.0 WAR). That's what we call subtraction by addition.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN C Salvador Perez Age 24 TOP VET
LF Alex Gordon
Age 31





## CHICAGO WHITE SOX

78-84
Projected record

۷/۰۵

Contribution age

#### **GOTTA SCORE TO WIN**

First, the good news: 1B Jose Abreu, 28, led the majors in slugging percentage, and left-hander Chris Sale, 25, led the AL with 10.8 K's per nine innings and allowed two extra-base hits to lefties all season. Then there are the offseason acquisitions of SP Jeff Samardzija, LF Melky Cabrera, RP David Robertson and 1B/DH Adam LaRoche. All good, right? Well, here's the bad news: It still won't be enough to get the South Siders into contention. The team was outscored by 98 runs last season, and its rotation ranked 28th in WHIP at a terrible 1.41. And the Sox still have huge offensive holes in infielders Alexei Ramirez and Gordon Beckham, a duo that project to a .300 on-base percentage in 2015.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN
SP Carlos Rodon
Age 22

■ TOP VET SP Jeff Samardzija Age 30



AL > CENTRAL

## MINNESOTA TWINS

74-88

26.79

Projected record

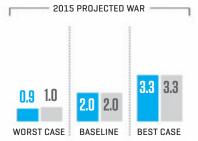
Contribution age

#### NOT IN THE NUMBERS

The Twins are projected to improve for the fifth straight year—yay! But there's still massive need for improvementboo! In addition to myriad other issues, most stemming from an aversion to analytics, the Twins had the worst outfield defense in the league last season with minus-50 defensive runs saved. How did they fix it? They signed hometown hero Torii Hunter, 39, who was third worst in baseball in DRS at minus-18. Then they signed fly ball pitcher Ervin Santana to a four-year, \$55M deal to ace a staff that already surrendered a lot of fly balls. If they're lucky, they'll see the debuts of top prospects Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano. If not, Twins fans are in for a long season of more of the same.

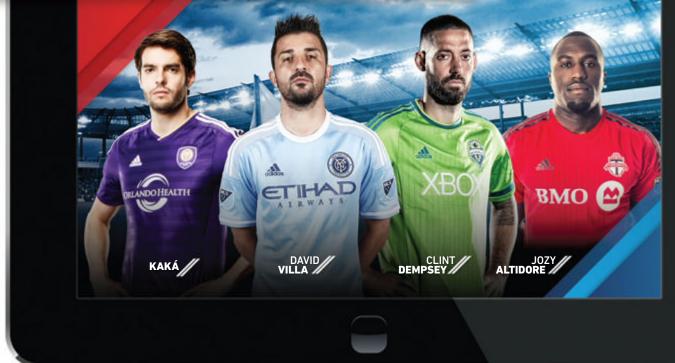
#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN CF Byron Buxton Age 21 TOP VET
1B Joe Mauer
Age 31









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# SEATTLE MARINERS

86-76

28.38

Projected record

Contribution age\*

#### MMM, MMM ... NOT BAD

Even after Seattle's best season since 2009, the M's needed more offense (25th in OPS in 2014) and power from the right side (28th in HRs by right-handers). So they added the trio of DH Nelson Cruz, OF Justin Ruggiano and 2B Rickie Weeks. One problem: Cruz, the best of the group, is a career .234/.309/.440 hitter at Safeco. But 2B Robinson Cano, 32, remains one of the game's best, and Felix Hernandez is as dominant as ever, projecting to an elite 1.04 WHIP this season. If James Paxton and Taijuan Walker develop into reliable back-end starters, Seattle's 13-season playoff drought will end.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS\*\*

TOP YOUNG'UN SS Brad Miller Age 25 TOP VET
2B Robinson Cano
Age 32

2015 PROJECTED WAR

7.3

0.8 3.8 23

WORST CASE BASELINE BEST CASE

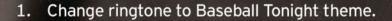
\*Average age, weighted by projected WAR. \*\*Young player (25 or under) and vet (30 or older) with team's highest projected WAR.

Analysis by ESPN.com senior writer David Schoenfield. Projections from ESPN Insider Dan Szymborski.





BASEBALL PREVIEW 2015



- 2. Dispose of former player jerseys. DO NOT put into storage in hopes of a return. (He's in Chicago now. Let it go, Boston.)
- Ensure lucky foul ball is in lucky baseball holder on lucky shelf facing due West.
- 4. Wash lucky [insert team here] PJs.
- Come up with clever fantasy baseball team name (TheSanFranciscoBrians?)
- 6. Come up with realistic-sounding illness to explain absence from work on Opening Day.
- 7. Ensure bobblehead collection is organized according to field position.
- 8. a. Use NIVEA Men Sensitive Shaving products to protect face from shaving irritation one last time before your team's inevitable win streak begins.
  - b. Use NIVEA Men Protective Lotion to moisturize and protect skin upon transition from winter man cave to first day at the ballpark.











OAKLAND WILD CARD A'S

85-77

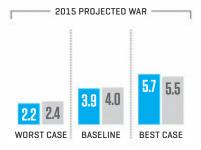
28.37

#### A'S GOOD, A'S NEW

After the team faded down the stretch-10 wins in the last 30 games-and blew the wild-card game, GM Billy Beane did what he does and worked the wires: He traded Oakland's best player, 3B Josh Donaldson, along with SP Jeff Samardzija and 1B Brandon Moss, and brought in utilityman Ben Zobrist, 3B Brett Lawrie, 1B Ike Davis, RP Tyler Clippard and DH Billy Butler to replace them. The A's are without their top three home run hitters from 2014 [combined 71 jacks]; the trio of Zobrist, Butler and Davis project to hit only 45 HRs. So young rotation arms—including Jarrod Parker, a year out from Tommy John surgery and still recovering-must step up behind Sonny Gray and Scott Kazmir, who combined for 409⅓ innings.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN TOP VFT SP Sonny Gray 2B Ben Zobrist Age 33 Age 25





#### LOS ANGELES **ANGELS**

84-78

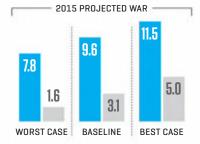
#### **ONE-MAN SHOW**

After finally winning his first MVP in 2014 (he deserved the award the previous two seasons), Mike Trout again projects as the best position player in the game. But pitchers discovered a weakness last year: Trout hit .097 against high fastballs, and his first-half numbers slid from .310/.400/.606 to .257/.347/.502 in the second half. Something else to worry about: SP Garrett Richards, who hurt his knee in August, and Matt Shoemaker went a combined 29-8 with a 2.81 ERA last season. The duo project to regress [24-14, 3.21], which will force the team to rely on its aging lineup, including rapidly declining Albert Pujols and Josh Hamilton, who is facing the prospect of a suspension.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN **CF Mike Trout** Age 23

TOP VFT 1B Albert Pujols Age 35





#### **TEXAS** RANGERS

77–85 Projected record

#### PROGRESSING TO AVERAGE

Injuries marred the 67-win disaster that was the Rangers' 2014 season, as Texas used the DL more than any other team in the majors. This year's 10-game projected upswing is based on a healthy Prince Fielder, who played just 42 games last season, and a resurgence from RF Shin-Soo Choo, who signed a \$130M contract after a .423 OBP with Cincinnati in 2013 but saw that stat dip to .340 in 2014. The duo project to hit for a combined 35 HRs and a .366 OBP. Meanwhile, Yovani Gallardo, 29, joins Derek Holland in trying to make up for the loss of Yu Darvish, who at press time was facing the prospect of Tommy John surgery. That void and a middling offense will limit the team's improvement.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN 2B Rougned Odor Age 21

TOP VFT 3B Adrian Beltre Age 35





#### HOUSTON ASTROS

76-86

**26.50** 

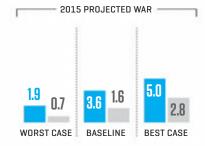
Projected record

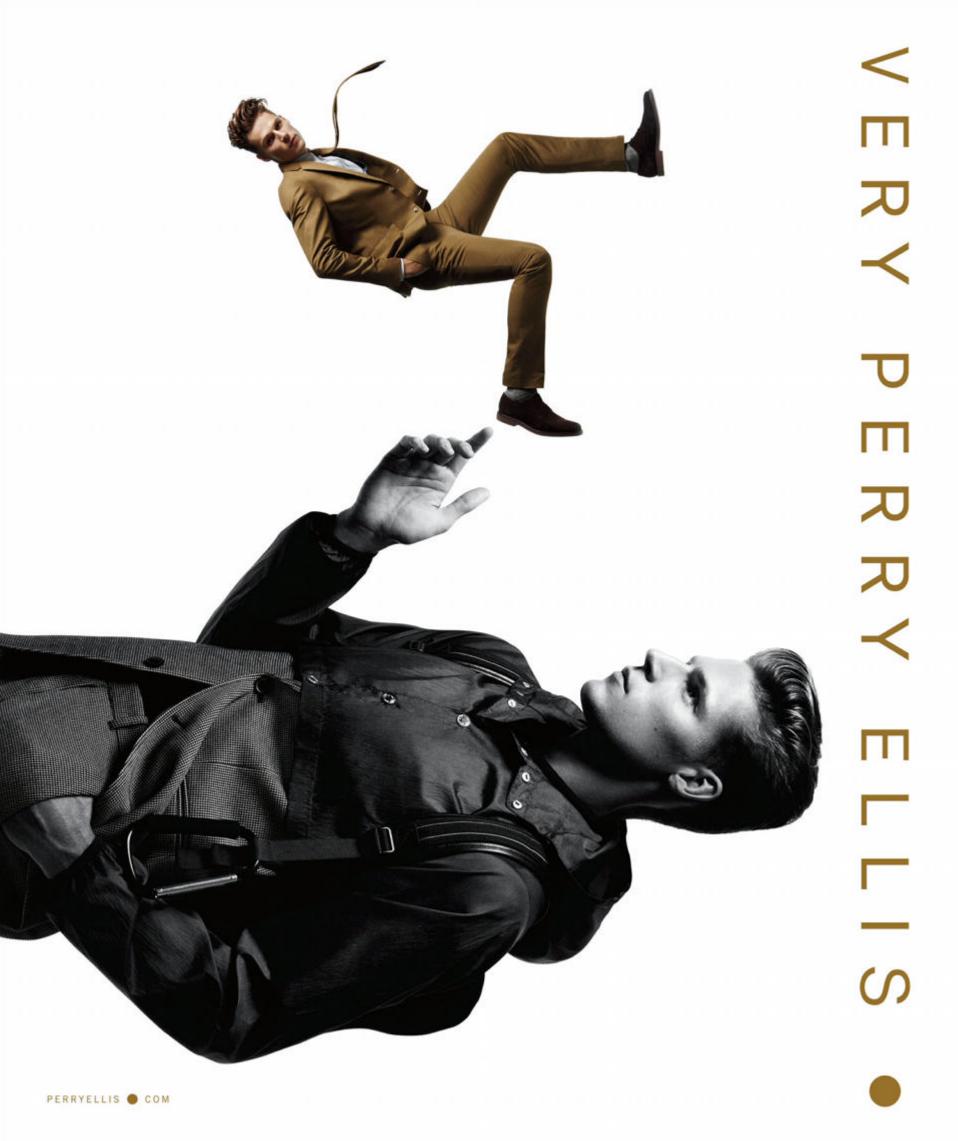
#### IT'S CALLED "ASSET-BUILDING"

Further evidence that tanking works: The Astros' 70-win season in 2014 was a 19-game jump from the previous year. This season? We see another six-game bump, and don't be shocked if Houston flirts with .500. Dallas Keuchel and Collin McHugh, both 27, were a surprise one-two punch in the rotation and project to pitch 354 innings with a combined 3.76 ERA in 2015. RF George Springer, 25, showed serious power as a rookie (.468 SLG), and newcomers Jed Lowrie (SS), Luis Valbuena (3B) and Evan Gattis (LF) will fix some holes on offense. Then there's Jose Altuve, who led the AL in average, hits and steals. With P Mark Appel and SS Carlos Correa in the pipeline, Houston's tank is filling up.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN TOP VET 2B Jose Altuve SS Jed Lowrie Age 24 Age 30







#### WASHINGTON NATIONALS

91-71

27.63

Projected record Contribution age\*

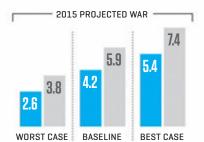
#### **CHIEFS OF STAFF**

Tanner Roark (15-10 last season) projects to have a 3.46 ERA in '15, surely starter-worthy. So why will he spend most of his time in the pen? Because the five starters ahead of him, including Max Scherzer, who minted a seven-year, \$210M deal, project to a combined 3.02 ERA. 3B Anthony Rendon, 24, boasts power and speed [21 HRs, 17 SBs in '14] and is already an MVP candidate (projected .807 OPS). Bryce Harper, just 22, is primed to make The Leap this season—ZiPS projects a huge jump in slugging (.423 to .494). Anything less than an NL East crown will qualify as a big disappointment.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS\*\*

TOP YOUNG'UN 3B Anthony Rendon Age 24

TOP VET SP Max Scherzer Age 30



\*Average age, weighted by projected WAR. \*\*Young player (25 or under) and vet (30 or older) with team's highest projected WAR.

Analysis by ESPN.com senior writer David Schoenfield. Projections from ESPN Insider Dan Szymborski.



# The Thrill of Hictory

The V Foundation has cause to celebrate. With the generous support of ESPN fans, sponsors and our donors, we raised more than \$2.2 MILLION for cancer research during V Week 2014. Thank you for joining us in our mission to defeat cancer for good.

jimmyv.org | facebook.com/thevfoundation



#### MIAMI MARLINS

81-81

Projected record

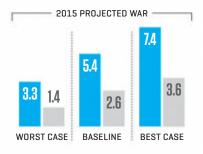
#### **HOOKED THE BIG ONE**

The historically stingy Marlins shocked baseball by giving RF Giancarlo Stanton (NL-high .555 SLG) the sport's first \$300M contract, keeping the MVP candidate in Miami for at least the next six years. The team made some other splashy moves too, but those didn't make it better. New 2B Dee Gordon doesn't get on base enough to lead off (projected .326 OBP), and starter Mat Latos is an injury risk after multiple elbow ailments the past two seasons with the Reds. Still, Miami's good (and young) core—CF Marcell Ozuna [24], LF Christian Yelich [23] and 22-year-old phenom Jose Fernandez [12.2 K/9 in 2014, expected to return from injury in July)—provides plenty of long-term hope.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN RF Giancarlo Stanton Age 25

TOP VFT 3B Martin Prado Age 31





### **NEW YORK**

80-82

**26.88** 

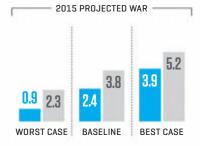
#### LOOK FAMILIAR?

After signing Michael Cuddyer, 35, early in free agency, the Mets ... did nothing, leading to more backlash from their disgruntled fan base. Three big reasons for optimism, though: a healthy David Wright, who couldn't drive fastballs in 2014 [.374 SLG versus .536 the previous five seasons) due to a shoulder issue; Juan Lagares, 25, who emerged as the best defensive center fielder in baseball (28 DRS); and the return of SP Matt Harvey, who tops a rotation stacked with talent. Zack Wheeler has the stuff to develop into a second ace, while ROY Jacob deGrom surrendered a .228 batting average to opponents in 2014. If the bullpen stays healthy, the Mets could contend for their first postseason since 2006.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN SP Zack Wheeler Age 25

TOP VFT 3B David Wright Age 32





#### ATLANTA BRAVES

74–88 Projected record 26.19

Contribution age

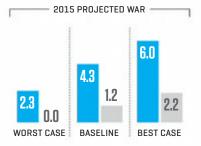
#### RECONSTRUCTION ERA

The Braves scored the second-fewest runs in the NL in 2014 and then curiously traded away three of their four best hitters in RF Jason Heyward [25], LF Justin Upton [27] and C Evan Gattis (28). But fear not, Atlanta fans. The team did receive an elite-level arm in return: Prized young pitcher Shelby Miller, acquired from the Cards for Heyward, joins Julio Teheran (1.13 projected WHIP), Alex Wood (1.20) and a hopefully healthier Mike Minor (shoulder) to cement an already good rotation. Sure, the Braves project to have the league's worst offense, and they're headed for their first consecutive losing seasons in 25 years. But they carry the league's youngest contribution age too.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN SP Julio Teheran Age 24

TOP VFT RF Nick Markakis Age 31



#### PHILADELPHIA HILLIES

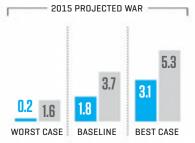
#### SLOW AND LOW. LET YOURSELF GO

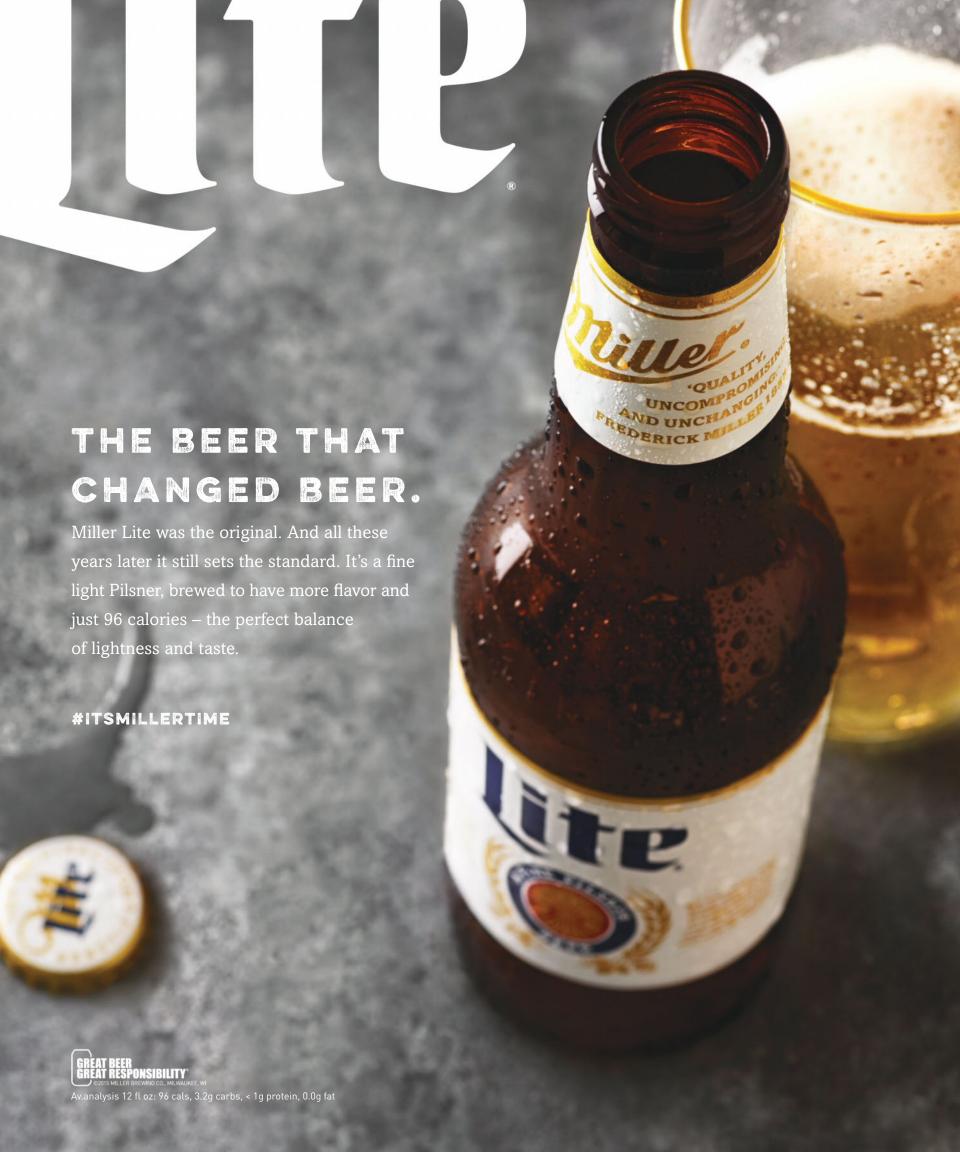
Well, this is awkward: The Phillies have the fifth-oldest contribution age and project to be MLB's worst team. Old and bad. Quite a combo. Everyone, of course, saw this coming years agoexcept GM Ruben Amaro Jr., who famously hates statistical evaluation. But the GM finally, mercifully committed to a rebuild, trading longtime Phil Jimmy Rollins, but he hasn't found a taker for 1B Ryan Howard and is still looking to deal Cole Hamels. In the meantime, 2015 feels like the 39th and final chance for "top prospect" Domonic Brown [.235/.285/.349, 10 HRs] to show he belongs. The Phils haven't lost 90 games since 2000. But this team? All but inevitable.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN 3B Maikel Franco Age 22

TOP VET SP Cole Hamels Age 31









#### ST. LOUIS **CARDINALS**

85-77

28.15

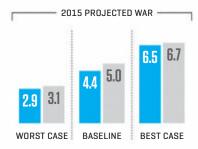
#### **NEW CARD IN THE DECK**

The Cards made one major move. After their right fielders had MLB's worst wOBA (weighted on-base average, a catch-all metric that captures offensive production), they acquired RF Jason Heyward from the Braves. He projects to hit .269 with an OBP of .348, but he alone can't fix an offense that relies on declining vets such as LF Matt Holliday, SS Jhonny Peralta and C Yadier Molina and that scored 164 fewer runs in 2014 than in 2013. The pressure is on aging but still elite SP Adam Wainwright (career 1.16 WHIP) and Michael Wacha, 23, who is coming off a rare scapular stress injury.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS\*\*

TOP YOUNG'UN RF Jason Heyward Age 25

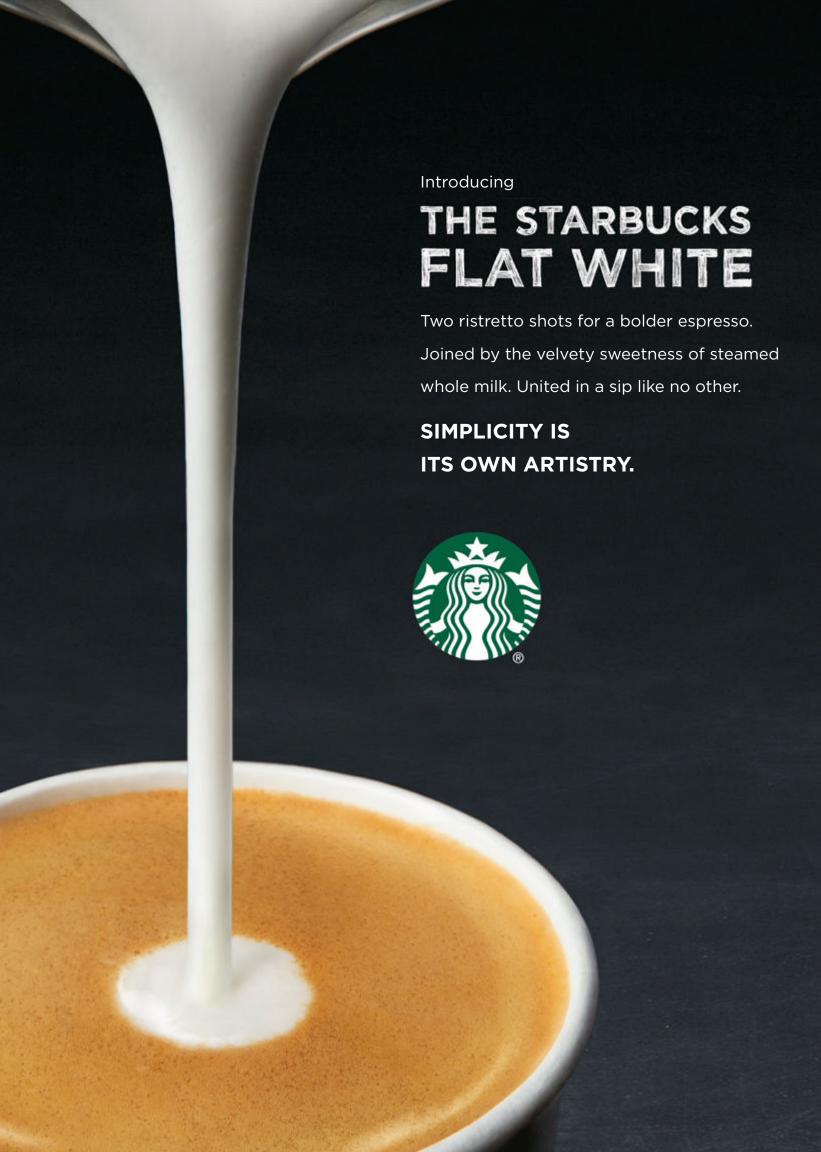
TOP VET SP Adam Wainwright Age 33



\*Average age, weighted by projected WAR. \*\*Young player (25 or under) and vet (30 or older) with team's highest projected WAR.

Analysis by ESPN.com senior writer David Schoenfield. Projections from ESPN Insider Dan Szymborski.









#### **MILWAUKEE** BREWERS

Projected record

Contribution age

#### MILWAUKEE'S AVERAGE

Time's running out for this batch of the Brew Crew. Yes, Jonathan Lucroy, perhaps the best catcher in baseball, and Carlos Gomez, perhaps the most electrifying center fielder, continue to provide hope (the two project to amass 10.2 WAR in 2015]. But both are 29. And former Toronto 1B Adam Lind, the Brewers' solution for an offense-oriented position at which they ranked 28th in wOBA, turns 32 in July. Major holes remain: SS Jean Segura's production fell from a 3.5 WAR as a rookie to 0.6 in 2014, and the rotation, built around has-beens Matt Garza and Kyle Lohse, projects to a mediocre 1.29 WHIP.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN TOP VET SS Jean Segura RF Ryan Braun Age 25 Age 31





#### **CINCINNATI** REDS

77–85

Projected record

#### Contribution age

#### **WALKS TO REMEMBER**

Aside from 1B Joey Votto, who should regain All-Star form in 2015 (projected .279/.417/.469), the Reds have been allergic to getting on base. Cincy's .296 on-base percentage ranked 29th last season. And with the continued decline of 2B Brandon Phillips (on-base and slugging percentages have dipped three straight years) and a likely deep regression from C Devin Mesoraco, the Reds will again struggle to score (a 28th-ranked 3.67 runs per game). The rotation, led by Johnny Cueto, Homer Bailey and Mike Leake (combined projected WHIP of 1.18), is undeniably good but won't be able to overcome a stunning lack of run support.

#### **ALL HAIL KING THEO!**

With baseball's third-youngest contribution age, the Cubbies are rising. New ace Jon Lester shores up a rotation that ranked 24th in ERA in 2014. And the offense, which ranked 26th in runs, should get a boost from 3B Kris Bryant, MLB's No. 1 prospect (1.098 OPS in the minors), and a fellow rookie, RF Jorge Soler (.573 SLG in a 24-game call-up). Then there's 1B Anthony Rizzo, 25, who projects to an .851 OPS. The Cubs won't win it all in 2015, but few teams are better positioned to do so in the near future.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

**CHICAGO** 

82-80

Projected record

CUBS

TOP YOUNG'UN 3B Kris Bryant Age 23 2015 PROJECTED WAR

**5.6** 6.0 WORST CASE | BASELINE BEST CASE

26.37

Contribution age

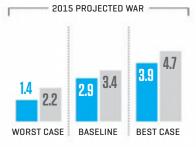
TOP VET

Age 31

SP Jon Lester

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN TOP VET CF Billy Hamilton 1B Joey Votto Age 31 Age 24



**90** ESPN The Magazine 03/30/2015 JONATHAN DANIEL/GETTY IMAGES



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# The First Ever DRY SPRAY ANTIPERSPIRANT

FROM AXE°



GOES ON DRY, KEEPS YOU DRY
WITH NO VISIBLE RESIDUE



SAN DIEGO WILD CARD PADRES

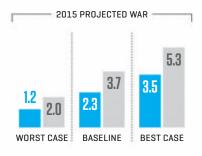
#### IN THE BALANCE

There's no question that the Padres, after a busy offseason, are a more interesting team than in past years. But are they actually better? New ace James Shields joins Andrew Cashner, Tyson Ross and Ian Kennedy for what should be an excellent top four of the rotation (projected WHIP of 1.19). But while the new outfield of Matt Kemp, Wil Myers and Justin Upton will certainly jump-start 2014's worst offense, it projects to have major defensive issues—Myers and Kemp had a combined minus-30 defensive runs saved last year. And the infield of Yonder Alonso, Jedd Gyorko, Will Middlebrooks and Alexi Amarista [combined 1.4 WAR last season] needs to start getting on base.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN CF Wil Myers Age 24

TOP VFT SP James Shields Age 33





#### SAN FRANCISCO **GIANTS**

83-79

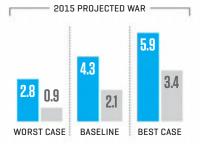
28.64

#### THE BIGGER THEY ARE ...

Whenever the Giants wake from their World Series-induced hangover, they'll be disappointed to see a division that's passed them by. They quietly pursued SPs Jon Lester and James Shields but didn't get either, and they lost fan favorite Pablo Sandoval and Mike Morse, In their place? 3B Casev McGehee, who hasn't eclipsed a .700 OPS since 2010, and OF Nori Aoki, who projects to a tiny 1.8 WAR. They also re-signed Jake Peavy, 33, and Ryan Vogelsong, 37, to back a rotation topped by Madison Bumgarner and Matt Cain, whose 2012 season [1.04 WHIP) seems but a distant memory. San Francisco has missed the playoffs every season after a World Series title. This year will be no different.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN TOP VFT SP Madison Bumgarner RF Hunter Pence Age 25 Age 32





#### COLORADO ROCKIES

74–88 Projected record

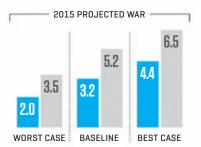
#### TO BUILD OR DESTROY

Colorado's new GM, Jeff Bridich, was the least active in baseball this offseason, seemingly paralyzed by the team's big question: Can the Rockies get back in contention now that Troy Tulowitzki and Carlos Gonzalez are finally healthy? Or should Bridich take the message from four straight 88-plus-loss seasons and go into an Astros-like rebuild? Tulo, 30, projects to a .942 OPS but hasn't played a full season since 2009. And CarGo, who hasn't topped 500 PA since 2012, has an expected .865 OPS. While the GM ponders, he might want to figure out A) his rotation (26 starters over the past two seasons, second most in the majors), and B) how to win on the road [21-60 in '14, worst by eight games].

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN 3B Nolan Arenado Age 24

TOP VFT SS Troy Tulowitzki Age 30





#### ARIZONA **D-BACKS**

73–89

26.67

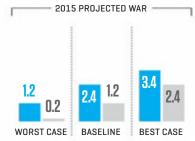
#### **HEAD OVER HEART**

After four seasons of Kirk Gibson's ineffective grit-and-heart managingand a 30-win drop over the period [no correlation, of course!]—the Diamondbacks replaced Gibson with A's bench coach Chip Hale to turn it all around. So what does Hale inherit? Arizona signed 24-year-old Cuban slugger Yasmany Tomas, who projects as a 20-plus homer guy at third base. That gives the D-backs four righthanded bats to anchor the lineup, including Paul Goldschmidt (projected .905 OPS), Mark Trumbo and A.J. Pollock. But to make any noise this year, Arizona needs the infield duo of Aaron Hill and Chris Owings to have OBPs over .300 and any pitcher to resemble an ace.

#### VALUE JUDGMENTS

TOP YOUNG'UN SS Chris Owings Age 23

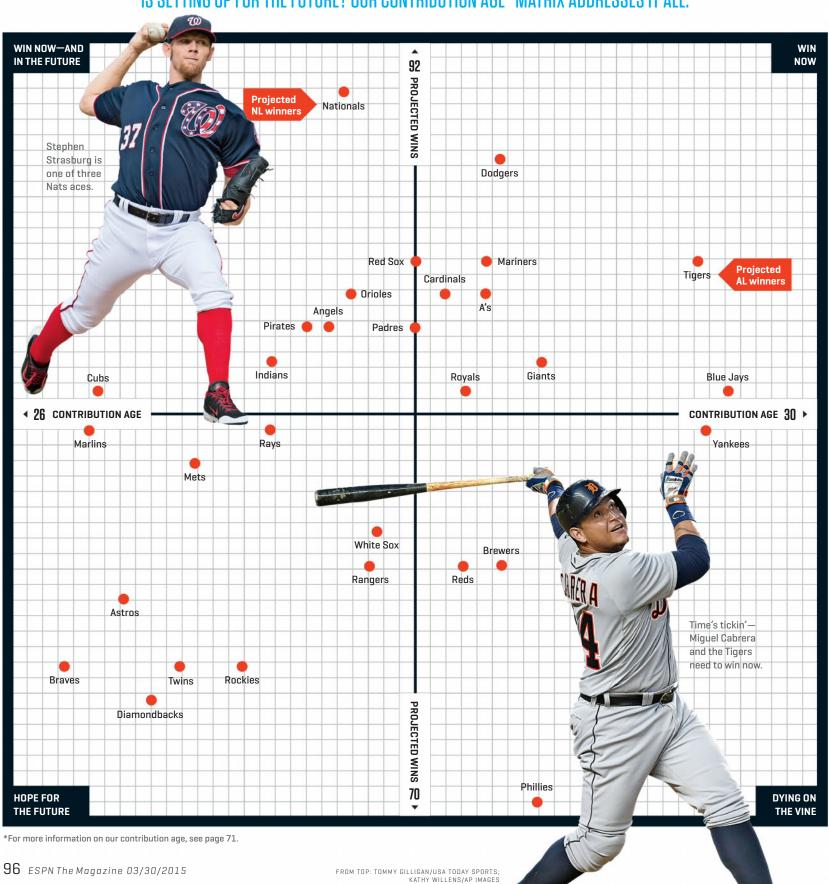
TOP VFT 2B Aaron Hill Age 33





### 

FROM SPLURGING ON VETERANS TO CULTIVATING FARMHANDS, EVERY TEAM HAS A DIFFERENT METHOD FOR BUILDING A CHAMPION. WHO IS PRIMED TO WIN NOW? WHO IS HEADED FOR A CRASH? WHO IS SETTING UP FOR THE FUTURE? OUR CONTRIBUTION AGE\* MATRIX ADDRESSES IT ALL.







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# MLB CONFIDENTIAL

It's an odd-numbered year, and you know what that means: A team not named the Giants actually has a shot at winning this year's Fall Classic. So who's up? According to the 117 major leaguers\* we polled anonymously, this is the Nationals' World Series to lose. But—spoiler alert—players also tagged the Marlins as this season's zeros-to-heroes squad, picking up where the Royals left off. That means the NL East owns the action in 2015, and that's just the beginning of Confidential gems we've uncovered. Read on as we canvass pros on everything from whom they love (Mike Trout) to whom they'd love to be (Tom Brady). —MORTY AIN, ANNA KATHERINE CLEMMONS, DAN FRIEDELL, STACEY PRESSMAN



# WHO WILL WIN THE WORLD SERIES?

NATIONALS 30% MARINERS 17% ANGELS 10%

#### WHICH TEAM WILL BE THE 2014 ROYALS?

MARLINS 25% CUBS 18% PADRES 12%

"MIAMI MARLINS. TWO WORDS: DEE. GORDON." —AMERICAN LEAGUE CATCHER

### BASEBALL GAMES ARE TOO SIOW.

60%

I LIKE THE IDEA OF A PITCH CI NCK.

78%

I LIKE REPLAY.

84%

"I LIKE REPLAY, BUT FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, SPEED IT UP." —AMERICAN LEAGUE PITCHER

#### WHO IS THE BEST OVERALL PLAYER IN MLB?

# MIKE TROUT

MIGUEL CABRERA 10% CLAYTON KERSHAW 8%

#### WHO IS THE MOST OVERRATED PLAYER IN MLB?

# **BRYCE HARPER**

**YASIEL PUIG** 15%

# WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PLAYERS DO YOU THINK USE PEDS?

AVERAGE ANSWER 10%

#### I'M HAPPY TO SEE ALEX RODRIGUEZ BACK FROM HIS YEARLONG SUSPENSION.

YES 41% NO 29% I DON'T CARE 30%

"HE BURNED THE UNION. THAT DIDN'T SIT WELL WITH PLAYERS, SO WE'LL SEE HOW THAT PLAYS OUT ON THE FIELD THIS YEAR."

—AMERICAN LEAGUE PITCHER



# YOU'RE COMMISSIONER FOR THE DAY. WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU WOULD DO? SHORTEN THE

**TOP ANSWER** 19%

"WE GET TWO DAYS OFF A MONTH.
PEOPLE WITH REGULAR JOBS GET
MORE DAYS OFF THAN THAT!"

—AMERICAN LEAGUE OUTFIELDER

## WHICH PLAYER WOULD MAKE THE MOST ENTERTAINING REALITY-SHOW STAR?

"C.J. WILSON. HE'S INTO RACING CARS, HE TRAVELS EVERYWHERE. AND HE'S [MARRIED TO] A SUPERMODEL."

—AMERICAN LEAGUE OUTFIELDER

"IT'S YASIEL PUIG. HE'S COMPLETELY INSANE. HE'S GOT TO BE UP TO SOME WACKY STUFF. THAT WOULD BE THE SHOW TO WATCH." —AMERICAN LEAGUE PITCHER

"DIDN'T MADISON BUMGARNER BUS DOWN HIS CATTLE FOR SPRING TRAINING? AND HE BOUGHT HIS WIFE A BABY BULL AS A WEDDING GIFT. YOU'RE TELLING ME YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO WATCH THAT?" —AMERICAN LEAGUE PITCHER

"WADE MILEY. IT'D BE LIKE DUCK DYNASTY."

—AMERICAN LEAGUE PITCHER

# SHOULD THE ROYALS HAVE WAVED ALEX GORDON HOME IN GAME 7 OF THE WORLD SERIES?

41% VES 46% VII 13% TIMVT WATE

GRADE BUD SELIG, A-F, ON HIS BASEBALL LEGACY.

D 2% -

A 50%

**B** 40%

**C** 8%

IF YOU COULD TRADE LIVES WITH ONE OTHER FAMOUS ATHLETE, WHO WOULD IT RF?

# LEBRON JANES

TOM DRADY

**TOP ANSWERS**14% EACH

"I'D BE TOM BRADY. PLAYING IN THE SUPER BOWL, SLEEPING NEXT TO GISELE? C'MON!"

-AMERICAN LEAGUE PITCHER







HE THROWS 96. HE'S THE JAYS' NO. 1 PROSPECT. **HE SIGNED FOR MILLIONS.** AND HE LIVES IN A VAN. **MEET THE MOST INTERESTING PITCHER IN BASEBALL,** 



BY ELI SASLOW



smelling them and finally deciding it's safe to eat them. While the eggs cook on a portable stove, he begins the morning ritual of cleaning his van, pulling the contents of his life into the parking lot. Out comes a surfboard. Out comes a subzero sleeping bag. Out comes his only pair of jeans and his handwritten journals. A curious shopper stops to watch. "Hiya," Daniel Norris says, waving as the customer walks away into the store. Norris turns back to his eggs. "I've gotten used to people staring," he says.

This is where Norris has chosen to live while the lefty tries to win a job in the Blue Jays' rotation: in a broken-down van parked under the blue fluorescent lights of a Wal-Mart in the Florida suburbs. There, every morning, is one of baseball's top-ranked prospects, doing pullups and resistance exercises on abandoned grocery carts. There he is each evening, making French press coffee and organic stir-fry on his portable stove. There he is at night, wearing a spelunking headlamp to go with his unkempt beard, writing in his "thought journal" or rereading Kerouac.

He has been here at Wal-Mart long enough that some store employees have given him a nickname—Van Man—and begun to question where he's from and what he might be doing. A few have felt so bad for him that they've approached the van with prayers and crumpled bills, assuming he must be homeless. They wonder: Is he a runaway teen? A destitute surfer? A new-age wanderer lost on some spiritual quest?

The truth is even stranger: The Van Man has a consistent 92 mph fastball, a \$2 million signing bonus, a deal with Nike and a growing fan club, yet he has decided the best way to prepare for the grind of a 162-game season is to live here, in the back of a 1978 Westfalia camper he purchased for \$10,000. The van is his escape from the pressures of professional baseball, his way of dropping off the grid before a season in which his every movement will be measured, cataloged and analyzed.

If a baseball life requires notoriety, the van offers seclusion. If pitching demands repetition and exactitude, the van promises freedom.

"It's like a yin-and-yang thing for me," he says. "I'm not going to change who I am just because people think it's weird. The only way I'm going to have a great season is by starting out happy and balanced and continuing to be me. It might be unconventional, but to feel good about life I need to have some adventure."

On this morning, Norris' adventure turns out to be the van itself. He finishes breakfast and turns the key in the ignition, and the engine refuses to start. "Come on, old friend. You can do this," he says, gently patting his hand against the dashboard. He is due at the Blue Jays' spring training facility in an hour for a workout, a massage and a throwing session. He tries the key again, and the engine erupts like a firecracker. Gas leaks onto the parking lot and a cloud of smoke shoots out from the tailpipe, but the VW makes it into gear. "There you

go," Norris says, talking again to the van. "Back on the road. Just you and me."

He bought it in 2011, a few weeks after signing his first contract out of high school with the Blue Jays, and the VW has been his best friend and his spiritual center ever since. He named it Shaggy after a character in Scooby-Doo. He sings it songs and writes it poems and gives it Valentine's Day cards. He takes it for hiking expeditions in the mountains of Tennessee and surfing trips along the Carolina coast. He drives it each year to spring training in Florida, and this year he stretched that trip out over a few weeks. He drove without a schedule from his home in Tennessee, avoiding the interstate and exploring the dirt roads of Appalachia, sleeping each night in the crawl space behind the driver's seat with his head tucked against the back door. When he finally arrived in Florida, he parked illegally on the beach and camped inside the VW until local police evicted him and offered directions to the 24-hour Wal-Mart, his home ever since.

Now he pulls out of Wal-Mart and drives three miles through Dunedin, squeezing the VW into a parking spot among his teammates' luxury sports cars and tinted SUVs. He sits in the back of the van to heat water for coffee. A few Blue Jays stop by on their way into the facility and watch Norris fiddle with his stove. The pilot light doesn't seem to be working. The water is still cold. "Why don't you just, like, go get something normal to eat," says another young pitcher, Marcus Stroman, reminding Norris that the team provides free coffee inside. "Don't you think this is kind of crazy?"

"Not to me," Norris says. "To me this is the way that makes sense."

HE HAS ALWAYS lived by his own code, no matter what anyone thinks: a three-sport star athlete in high school who spent weekends camping alone; a hippie who has never tried drugs; a major league pitcher whose first corporate relationship was with an environmental organization called 1% for the Planet. He is 21 and says he has never tasted alcohol. He has had one serious relationship, with his high school girlfriend, and it ended in part because he wanted more time to travel by himself. He was baptized in his baseball uniform. His newest surfboard is made from recycled foam. His van is equipped with a solar panel. He reads hardcover books and never a Kindle. He avoids TV and studies photography journals instead.

Nonconformist, reads one sign posted inside his VW. But all professional sports value their conformists—athletes who sacrifice individuality for team and whose predictable behavior elicits predictable results. Perhaps nowhere is consistency more valued than in baseball, a game whose self-reverence for tradition and purity might be contributing to its fading place as America's pastime. The history of the game is valued above any one major league season; the integrity of a season is valued





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#### Legal Notice

If You Were on a Roster of an NCAA Division I Football or Men's Basketball Team, and That Team Was Included in One of EA's Videogames Between May 4, 2003 and September 3, 2014, You Could Be Entitled to Cash Payments.

This Notice is only a summary of your rights and options. For more detailed information, visit www.NCAA-EA-Likeness-Settlement.com or call 1-888-283-5733 toll-free.

#### What's This About?

A federal court is currently reviewing two proposed class action settlements concerning the alleged use of the names, images, and likenesses of NCAA men's football and basketball players in certain NCAA-Branded Videogames that were manufactured and distributed by Electronic Arts Inc. ("EA"). The two proposed settlements are (1) the "EA Videogame Settlement" and (2) the "NCAA Videogame Settlement."

The EA Videogame Settlement involves claims by student-athletes that EA and the Collegiate Licensing Company ("CLC") violated their legal rights by allegedly licensing, using, and/or selling athletes' names, images, and likenesses in EA's NCAA-Branded Videogames. The NCAA Videogame Settlement involves claims by student-athletes that the NCAA violated their legal rights by allegedly participating in the license, use, and/or sale of athletes' names, images, and likenesses in EA's NCAA-Branded Videogames. All Defendants deny any wrongdoing. The Court has not ruled on the merits of these claims.

The proposed settlements would resolve the claims described above against all Defendants. The EA Videogame Settlement has a \$40 million Settlement Fund and would resolve the claims as to EA and CLC. The NCAA Videogame Settlement has a \$20 million Settlement Fund and would resolve the claims as to NCAA.

You may be a member of one or both settlements. The two settlements share many terms and involve many of the same Class members, but are separate settlements, so you should make sure that you understand both settlements.

The Court will have a hearing on July 16, 2015, at 2:00 p.m. (Pacific time) to decide whether to approve the settlements. If you want to attend the hearing, keep in mind that the date and/or time may be changed, so you should check the settlement website before making travel plans. See below for more information.

#### Who's Included in the Settlements?

If you were (1) on a roster of an NCAA Division I football or men's basketball team, and that team was included in an NCAA-Branded Videogame originally published from July 21, 2005 through September 3, 2014, or (2) on such a roster from May 4, 2003, and your jersey number or photograph appeared in such a Videogame, you may be a Class Member in one or both of the settlements.

There are different class definitions for each settlement. You should consult the settlement website for more detailed class definitions and more information about whether you are entitled to a payment under either settlement.

#### Are These Settlements Related to the Trial Against the NCAA I've Heard About?

Heard About?

You may have heard recently about a trial involving student-athletes (led by Ed O'Bannon) against the NCAA. Although the trial involved claims that the NCAA used student-athlete likenesses without permission, those claims were against the NCAA only for violations of antitrust laws. Also, unlike the claims being resolved by this settlement, the claims in the trial involved a request for injunctive relief (a court order discontinuing certain practices). The claims in the trial did not involve claims for eash payments for past conduct.

The Court found that the NCAA violated antitrust law and entered an injunction. The NCAA has appealed. The Court's opinion can be found at www.NCAA-EA-Likeness-Settlement.com.

#### What Do the Settlements Provide?

Both proposed settlements provide for cash payments to eligible Class Members. You can make a claim under both settlements. More information about how payments will be calculated (the "Distribution Plan") is available at the settlement website.

Plan') is available at the settlement website.

In addition, Class Counsel will seek from the Court the following attorneys' fees awards: (1) EA Videogame Settlement: up to \$13.2 million in fees, \$2.5 million in expenses, and incentive awards to the Plaintiffs who brought the suits ranging from \$2,500–\$15,000 each; (2) NCAA Videogame Settlement: up to \$5.8 million in fees, \$500,000 in expenses, and incentive awards to the Plaintiffs of \$5,000 each.

Class Counsel will file their motion for fees, expenses and awards by April 13, 2015. The Court will decide the issue at the Fairness Hearing (see below).

#### What Are Your Options?

(1) Get a Payment: You are eligible for a cash payment if you qualify and submit a Claim Form—either online or by mail—to the Settlement Administrator by July 2, 2015. More information about how to complete and submit the Claim Form is available at the settlement website.

Requesting or receiving a payment under these settlements will NOT affect your eligibility to compete in NCAA athletics.

(2) Exclude Yourself from One or Both Settlements: You must submit a separate exclusion (or "opt-out") request for each settlement from which you wish to exclude yourself. You may exclude yourself from one or both settlements. Your exclusion request must be mailed to the Settlement Administrator's address below so that it is postmarked by May 4, 2015. More information about how to opt out is available at the settlement website.

(3) Object to One or Both Settlements: You have the right to object to any element of one or both settlements, including the Distribution Plans and Class Counsel's requests for fees, costs, and incentive awards. You cannot object in order to ask the Court for a higher payment for yourself personally, although you can object to the payment terms that apply generally to the Class. Your objection request must be mailed to the Settlement Administrator's address below so that it is postmarked by May 4, 2015. More information about how to object to one or both settlements is available at the settlement website.

#### When/Where Is the Fairness Hearing?

The Court will hold a hearing on July 16, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. (Pacific time) to consider whether to approve the settlements, including the Distribution Plans and the attorneys' fees and incentive awards. You may ask to appear at the Hearing, but you don't have to. The courthouse address is United States District Court for the Northern District of California, 1301 Clay Street, Oakland, CA 94612. The date and/or time of the Fairness Hearing may be changed, so you should check the settlement website before making travel plans.

#### How Do I Get More Information?

The settlement website, www.NCAA-EA-Likeness-Settlement. com, contains more detailed information. You also may call the Settlement Administrator toll-free at 1-888-283-5733, e-mail at info@NCAA-EA-Likeness-Settlement.com, or write to the Settlement Administrator at Gilardi & Co. LLC, P.O. Box 8060, San Rafael, CA 94912-8060.



beyond any one team; the identity of a team is more important than that of its players. Flashiness of any kind is discouraged, so players such as Yasiel Puig have to defend themselves simply for celebrating a home run. In the game's unwritten code, drawing individual attention is considered unbecoming, if not downright unsportsmanlike.

Before the Blue Jays understood his convictions, Norris felt the team had trouble making sense of his unpredictable life, coaches, teammates and executives asking him questions that indicated a measure of unease. Why, with seven figures in the bank, did he take an offseason job working 40 hours a week at an outdoor outfitter in his hometown of Johnson City, Tennessee? Would it do permanent damage to his back muscles to spend his first minor league season sharing an apartment with two teammates in Florida and sleeping only in a hammock? Why had he decided to spend his first offseason vacationing not on a Caribbean cruise with teammates or partying in South Beach but instead alone in the hostels of Nicaragua, renting a motorcycle for \$2 a day, hiking into the jungle, surfing among the stingrays? And was that really a picture on Twitter of the Blue Jays' best prospect, out again in the woods, shaving his tangled beard with the blade of an ax?

It was all so damn ... unconventional. And yet for some reason, in Norris' case, it also seemed to be working, so the team's curiosity never rose to the level of complaint. "He takes care of himself as well as anybody we've got," says Tony LaCava, Toronto's assistant general manager. "He's in great shape. He competes on the mound. If that wasn't the case, maybe we'd be more worried about some of the other stuff. But right now, the van and all that is secondary. He has great values, and they're working for him."

Last season Norris started the year in Class-A, led all of the minor leagues in strikeouts per nine innings and climbed steadily into the major leagues, appearing in five games for the Blue Jays in September. Suddenly, Van Man was taking private planes to Boston and New York, striking out David Ortiz, packing his teammates' beer bags for the flight as part of a rookie hazing ritual but still refusing to drink himself. He usually set his alarm early on the road and headed into the city with a camera to explore. "Start behaving like a big leaguer," one player teased him, but what so many teammates didn't seem to understand was that conventionality was the exact thing Norris was hoping to avoid. He was terrified of living by someone else's code.

For almost 80 years, his father and grandfather owned and operated a small bicycle shop in car-dependent Johnson City, and their store was not only a place to sell bikes but a way to spread their family values and popularize a belief system. Play outdoors. Love the earth. Live simply. Use only what you need. Norris spent his childhood outside with his parents and his two older sisters, going for weekend bike rides and hiking trips, playing football, basketball and baseball. In school, he was a varsity star in all three, but it was baseball—and particularly pitching—that most aligned with his personality. Being alone on the mound reminded him of being out in the wild, where he was forced to solve his own problems and wrestle with self-doubt. "I was a good pitcher because I was already good at taking care of myself," he says. "I love having teammates behind me, but I'm not going to rely on them. It can get quiet and lonely out there when you're pitching, which drives some people crazy. But that's my favorite part."

By midway through his freshman season in high school, he was one of the best players on varsity, and the stands began to fill with regional scouts. Soon, agents like Scott Boras were coming to see him in his father's bicycle shop. In June 2011, the Blue Jays drafted him in the second round. The team said it wouldn't offer Norris a contract until the end of the summer, so Norris' agent advised him to take a few months off, avoid injury and wait for the money to roll in. "Yeah, that's not going to fit with my style," Norris told him, then ignored the advice and did something virtually



#### **DRAFT MORE DANIEL NORRISES!**

Moneyball devotees warn against using Round 1 and 2 picks on high school pitchers like Norris. The devotees have a point. A larger percentage of college pitchers in those rounds make the Show.

43%

60%

But drafting high school lefties in the first two rounds is another matter. They're more likely to have good careers [10 WAR or higher], like Barry Zito, or fantastic careers [25 WAR or higher], like Cole Hamels.—MIKE PETRIELLO

13.5%
12.7%

#### A 25-WAR CAREER

HIGH SCHOOL LEFTIES	5.8%
COLLEGE LEFTIES	3.9%

SOURCE: BASEBALL-REFERENCE.COM, SINCE 1965

unprecedented for a top prospect. He moved to Atlanta to spend the summer playing center field for an amateur team, risking his career with nobody watching in the stands simply because he wanted to be playing baseball outside.

On the morning in 2011 when his \$2 million signing bonus finally cleared, Norris was in Florida with the rest of the Blue Jays' new signees. All of their bonuses had been deposited on the same day, and one of the players suggested they drive to a Tampa mall. They shopped for three hours, and by the time the spree finally ended they could barely fit their haul back into the car. Most players had spent \$10,000 or more on laptops, jewelry and headphones. Norris returned with only a henley T-shirt from Converse, bought on sale for \$14. It's been a fixture of his wardrobe ever since.

It unsettled him in those first months to see so many zeros on his bank account balance—"Who am I to deserve that?" he wondered. "What have I really done?"—so he hired financial advisers and asked them to stash the money in conservative investments where Norris wouldn't have to think about it. His advisers deposit \$800 a month into his checking account—or about half as much as he would earn working full time for

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# "WHERE **ELSE CAN YOU BE AS** FREE AS B' YOURSEL MIDDLE O **ADVENTURE IS FREE**I

FROM NORRIS' THOUGHT JOURNAL

minimum wage. It's enough to live in a van, but just barely. "I'm actually more comfortable being kind of poor," he says, because not having money maintains his lifestyle and limits the temptation to conform. He never fills Shaggy beyond a quarter tank. He fixes its engine with duct tape rather than taking it to a mechanic. Instead of eating out with teammates, he writes each night in a journal that rests on the dashboard.

"Research the things you love," he wrote one night. "Gain knowledge. It's valuable."

"Be kind. Be courteous. Love others and be happy. It's that simple."

"Where else can you be as free as by yourself in the middle of nowhere, or in the middle of the ocean, or on the peak of a mountain. Adventure is freedom."

**NOW IT'S 7:30 A.M.** near the beginning of spring training, freedom fading into memory, and Norris reports to the ballpark for his second bullpen session of the year. The Jays have sent Norris an itinerary for this workout, and they've dispatched a team of six trainers and coaches to make sure he follows it. He had a minor surgery to remove bone spurs from his elbow in the offseason, so his instructions for this workout are even more specific than normal:

Twenty-five pitches at 90 percent effort, all of them fastballs aimed low in the zone.

But before he can throw off the mound, there is an intensive warm-up that takes at least an hour. He weighs in at 192 pounds, with 6 percent body fat. He showers to relax his muscles. He loosens his shoulder. He stretches with the help of a trainer and walks out to a field of artificial turf, where the yardage is marked. He plays catch with a teammate: 10 throws from 30 feet. 10 from 60, 15 from 120 and another 10 from 60 feet. He walks to the bullpen and digs into the mound. Two trainers and four coaches watch as he

finds his footing. One records a video from the left, another from the right. "Twenty-five pitches," says Dane Johnson, the team's bullpen coach, and Norris stares down the catcher and counts the pitches in his head as he throws.

Sometimes during these moments on the mound, his arm feels almost foreign to him-like a gift, a fluke, all those fast-twitch muscles that for some reason just know how to fire. Twenty pitches left now. Fifteen. Twelve. Nobody else in his family was an athlete, yet for some reason he is ranked the 18th-best prospect in the major leagues, a strikeout specialist with a fastball that ramps up to 96 mph, a sharp slider and a 12-6 curve—what scouts consider the best natural stuff in the Blue Jays organization. He has a good chance to win the Blue Jays' final starting spot this season. Eight pitches left now. Six. "I am always trying to figure out why I can throw like this, because it doesn't make any sense," Norris says.

He loves the craft of pitching, obsesses over it and dreams about four-seam fastballs, but he dreams about other things too. Five pitches left now. Three. Two. He wants to go backpacking in Banff, publish his photography in the Patagonia catalog, surf in Hawaii, go rock climbing in Oregon. He wants to be a great pitcher, but so much else too.

"OK. That's 25," Johnson says.

"Go cool down," says George Poulis, the head trainer, and Norris returns to the team's indoor facility for another stretching routine, another shower, another massage. By the time he finally leaves the facility, it is early afternoon, and he has thrown 25 pitches in six hours. He opens Shaggy's driver's side door, and his cellphone vibrates with a new text from a coach. It is the slow-motion video of his workout, accompanied by a short message of instruction: "Focus on the details."



HE DRIVES AWAY from the field, beyond the sprawling suburbs of the Gulf Coast and out toward the beach. He stops to buy groceries for dinner—a package of raw chicken and stir-fry vegetables for \$11.50, a splurge. Then he continues beyond the coast onto a two-lane causeway, a strip of road in the middle of the water, where he can pull off and park Shaggy directly on the sand.

This is his favorite beach in Florida, a 25-foot stretch of land separated from the road by a line of palm trees, a place so public that nobody else seems to notice it. The traffic cruises by on the causeway at 50 mph, and he has the beach to himself. He comes here to paddleboard, to read and to journal. Once, after a morning in the water, he returned to the beach and fell asleep on his surfboard. A few hours later, he felt the cold chill of water on his foot and awoke to see that the tide had risen and swept him back out into the ocean on his board. He was quite a distance from shore, out there by himself, disoriented and scared. "That was one of the best moments of my life," he says.

Now he watches the sun dip toward the horizon as his dinner cooks on the portable stove. He calls his father and lets him listen to Shaggy's engine over the phone. "Sounds pretty good, right?" he says. He receives a message from his mother: "We're proud of you for being you," she tells him. He sets down his phone and puts on sunglasses. Gulls dive into the water. Waves crash onto the beach. The sunset paints his van in oranges and blues.

"Perfect," he says.

Soon the season will begin in earnest, and he will eventually shave his beard and move into a teammate's house—two concessions to the pressures of the major leagues. He wants the Blue Jays to know he takes his job seriously. "There are some things that I'm just going to have to get over," he says. "I can't be by myself all the time. I can't live the total minimalist life. I guess I'm going to have to figure out where and when to give in. How much is necessary? How much feels right?"

He sometimes senses the assumption from other players and fans that his eccentricity is just a passing phase. Will he really continue to live in a van if \$2 million becomes \$50 million? Will he still have a thought journal when he's not just a fringe baseball curiosity but a star? How can even the most ardent nonconformist survive the pressures of mainstream fame, corporate sponsorship and the traditionalism of the game. "What I'll do, if baseball goes well, is I'll become even more of an ambassador for the things I really care about," he says. "I'll make sure Shaggy's still running. I'll pioneer change in how sports thinks about the environment." He wants to make fans more aware of the earth and make stadiums less wasteful.

But now it is just Van Man and Shaggy alone on the beach, and the pressure is mostly abstract, and there's no one to judge him and no reason to conform. He walks toward the surf, and the wind whips against his jacket. The sky shows its stars, and he tries to name them. The moon is nearly full, and its light casts his shadow across the beach. Norris takes out his camera and starts photographing everything he sees: the shadow, the van, the stars, the road. "I have to capture this," he says, because it is another night on a deserted beach and he is at ease, and maybe he can hold on to the moment. Maybe he can make it last.

#### THE TRUTH



#### by **HOWARD BRYANT**



# [ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES] College basketball coaches like Jim Boeheim hold themselves high as molders of young men. But when you remove their masks, the truth isn't so pretty.

n 2008, financial institutions led by Citigroup and Merrill Lynch received \$175 billion of taxpayer money during the federal government bailout, then gave their employees \$32.6 billion in bonuses. In 2014, Bud Selig and Roger Goodell each earned more in salary and bonuses than most every player in their sports.

As accountability continues its losing streak to big money, the Masters of the Universe solidify their place in America. Tom Wolfe's term, coined in the 1980s to describe ruthless Wall Street climbers, now applies to elite college coaches as the sports industrial complex grows more powerful. Jim Boeheim and his fallen Syracuse basketball program are just the latest example. Boeheim, that great leader of young men who, like hundreds of others in his profession, has for years profited from the popular narrative of the coach as moral influence, was recently whacked by an eight-year NCAA investigation that portrayed him as the head of a corrupt program. The NCAA is hardly in a moral position to cast judgment on anyone, but both judge and defendant are part of the same cartel, and Boeheim was in violation of how the cartel does business.

Boeheim has been at Syracuse for 39 years and is the unquestioned leader of the university's basketball program. He responded to the sanctions by blaming rogue elements in his program instead of taking the responsibility that should come with his longevity and his \$1.8 million annual salary. He then refused to appear at the postgame news conference that followed Syracuse's season-ending loss to North Carolina State. Instead, Boeheim stuck a poor assistant coach, Mike Hopkins, in front of the microphones while he shrank from the spotlight.

Now, there's a man who leads by example. Eighteen-year-olds across America clearly could learn from a man like Boeheim, whose program has now been placed on probation twice by the NCAA, yet he has already been enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame.

These Masters of the Universe answer to no one, and as their power increases, they grow even more belligerent. Former Connecticut coach

Jim Calhoun, another old Big East titan, was blinded by his arrogance and power; like Boeheim, he bullied and berated anyone who dared to question him. Calhoun and UConn women's coach Geno Auriemma for years were the highest-paid employees in the state during weak economies, budget shortfalls and a widening gap between the value of a college education and the massive student debt it incurs. Calhoun was so smug as to say in 2009 he wouldn't give back a dime even as his players were exploited. A year later, his program was sanctioned by the NCAA for what the school admitted were "major violations" under his watch.

The system has been neatly arranged into a staggeringly lucrative financial machine, driven at the top by ESPN and other networks that pay millions to broadcast games, making valuable commodities out of both winning programs and the coaches themselves (who use the broadcast booth between jobs as a way station to remain visible). Unlike Wall Street, for which Main Street carries a certain distrust and disdain, these Masters of the Universe are loudly and blindly shielded by rabid fan bases, loyal alumni and university presidents seduced by positive self-image. Corruption is something the other team does.

All boats rise, except the workforce. The dollar amounts are so high, the business relationships so blurred, that the watchdogs have often become peers; million-dollar journalists cannot exist without \$5 million coaches and \$10 million pro players, and the result is less accountability. This is the inescapable truth of the industry. But what can at least be destroyed is the accompanying false narrative that coaches are anything more than millionaire executives running a billion-dollar operation.

How fitting that Boeheim flails and bullies as Dean Smith, a figure of another time, has been laid to rest. Smith is gone, and the moral imprimatur of coach as the molder of young men, father figure and mentor is gone too. If these men still do exist in the college game, they are the special exceptions. But Boeheim and his fellow Masters are special too, for they are the world's only CEOs who don't pay their employees.





# The Thrill of Hictory

The V Foundation has cause to celebrate. With the generous support of ESPN fans, sponsors and our donors, we raised more than \$2.2 MILLION for cancer research during V Week 2014. Thank you for joining us in our mission to defeat cancer for good.

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